The Battle Cry

Charles Neville Buck

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The mountaineer's steady appraising gaze was still fixed on her face, seeming to penetrate her thoughts.

THE BATTLE CRY

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"The Call of the Cumberlands," etc.

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Charles Neville Buck

THE CALL OF THE CUMBERLANDS
THE KEY TO YESTERDAY
THE LIGHTED MATCH
THE PORTAL OF DREAMS

TO

MY MOTHER

WHOSE HIGH NOBILITY AND GRACIOUS
SWEETNESS HAVE BEEN MY LIFELONG
INSPIRATION AND REWARD, THIS
BOOK IS LOVINGLY
DEDICATED

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THE BATTLE CRY

CHAPTER I

AT that particular moment Juanita Holland could feel nothing but pride and love for the young man whose figure mingled with the other seven in a picture of spirited color. Against the verdant background of the polo field there were eight, but all save one seemed negligible.

The afternoon sun was sloping in amber drifts across the space where the ponies kicked up the turf and the silks of the team colors snapped like pennants about the straining shoulders of the players. It caught and edged the new springtime greenery with a margin of soft yellow. It flashed brightly upon pongee helmets and blue silk caps and splashed against the reeking flanks of the ponies. Of the hats and gowns along the white flagstoned terrace of the Bryn Mawr clubhouse, it made a great bouquet of nodding flowers, a bouquet which it caressed.

Juanita Holland sat near the front and as some of the other girls smiled knowingly at her parted lips and fixed eyes, their glances traveled to an engagement ring and the fashion in which the slender hand it adorned clenched itself in the tensity of her interest.

The board announced a score of four to three and a

quarter in favor of the Reds and the man whom her eyes followed played Number Two for the Blues. In the fraction of another minute the referee's whistle would end the last period and the game would be over. So when, from a tangled scrimmage and a stamping confusion in midfield, the girl saw the comet-like outshoot of a willow ball followed, close as a shadow follows, by the shapes of a pony and a man she knew, it is not wonderful that her blue eyes flashed into sparkle and the tender curves of her lips tightened, then parted.

There was now a chance; a small, remote embryo of a chance for turning defeat into victory just on the fringe of the combat—with a truly driven goal.

Juanita Holland herself knew the feel of a polo mallet and the intricacies of the game, and she knew that such a reversal of the issue could come only from a jockey's judgment of pace and a blacksmith's power of hitting.

The blossoming hats nodded like an old-fashioned garden stirred in a sudden breeze. The men broke off talk with words half finished. The white ball had risen and soared like a wingless bird and had come to earth rolling onward in a true line toward the goal posts. Seven ponies wheeled, scampering, and dashed with eight mallets held forward and upstretched above their necks, but a few yards in their lead raced a blood-bay mare with her forelegs tucked under her safe from the mallet's play. Across the field one could make out the red spot of an eagerly distended nostril and the strain of satin-coated muscles. Bending forward from her saddle with his eye fixed on the traveling ball, rode Roger Malcolm, menaced a length behind by the Red

Number Three, who was driving his mount to its last ounce of stamina. There, too, cutting out at an angle to meet them, came the Red goal guardian making a heroic effort to get up and slash the ball back out of peril. It was one of those tense, hard-breathing, leather-creaking moments when the issue hangs on a split-hair balance of steady nerve and lightning speed. Then as the Red Number Three brought his pony's muzzle to the blood bay's rump, the Red goal guardian slashed viciously at the willow sphere—and passed by with a misjudged stroke. A cry went up from the gallery and again the sharp, clear impact of mallet on ball snapped across the field like the crack of a mule-whip and again the ball rose and soared—this time cleanly between the goal posts. As the man who had saved the day for the Blues wheeled his pony and started to canter back to the center of the field, the final whistle shrilled the finish.

"One of Roger Malcolm's miracles," commented a Red sympathizer with a shrug. "Four and a quarter, to four; but I'm bound to say they won it neatly. The man's a wiz."

Leisurely the crowd began drifting from its center toward club-house and parked vehicles, but as Juanita Holland's glance fell on the diamond she wore her eyes abruptly lost their trance-like eagerness and deepened into involuntary betrayal of pain, as of one who is awakened from a pleasant dream to unwelcome reality.

"He was at his best then," she said to herself without words. "He is always at his best — when he plays."

She stood idly waiting for him while the crowd

thinned, and her face still wore a troubled abstraction. She saw him dismount and turn his pony over to a groom. She watched him shouldering his way toward her, impatient even of the delays caused by those who insisted on handshakes of congratulation. Though she was much younger than he, the curve of her lips shaped a faint smile of indulgence, such as one may wear for an eager child, as she read the boyish glow of his eyes and realized how much all this meant to him.

He was a clean, fine type — if all a man need be is honest, courteous and accomplished. He was strong and played his games with reckless abandon, if the strength of courage can exist in a soul that demands nothing more than the playing of games. He had always been deferentially anxious to do whatever she had asked of him — except to grow up. Of these things she thought as he made his way to her side.

"Dearest," he whispered, "will you wait for me while I change and let me drive you home?"

She shook her head, and realizing that she alone had not congratulated him, forced a radiant graciousness into her smile.

"It was splendid, Roger," she declared with an echo of transitory enthusiasm in her eyes, which lighted them like violets in the sun. "I don't believe any one else could have done it."

The young man's face glowed though he responded with self-deprecation.

"We all have our lucky moments. It was pretty much of an accident."

"In polo —" the thrill for a moment died in the girl's

voice —" one must make the lucky moment. You do it uncommonly well — in polo."

He caught the separate emphasis of her last two words and his brows contracted in an expression of sudden pain. " Meaning," he inquired quietly, " that I do only the trivial things well? I cite you the Biblical injunction, dear. 'What thy hand findeth to do —' "

" One's hand might *hunt* for things to do, but I'm not going to lecture you now. I'm saving that for this evening."

" Meanwhile may I drive you home? "

" Not to-day, Roger. I want to think and so I'm going to walk, but you can come over to dinner. There won't be any one else, the evening will be devoted to —" she paused, then added —" to your lecture."

The man smiled and made an impulsive movement to reach for her hand, then realizing that the terrace was not yet quite deserted, he restrained the impulse and laughed.

" Is it so serious as all that? "

The girl met his laughter with wide and very serious eyes. It even seemed to Malcolm that there was a little catch in her voice.

" It is to me," she said quietly. " I shall look for you at seven."

Juanita nodded and started toward the gates, and after a moment the man also turned and made his way to the showers.

As she followed the gravel walks roses were massed along her way and hedges sparkled with a delicacy

which the sun had not yet burned. The last of the polo ponies went by, blanketed and led by grooms. As they paraded to the stables they picked up their feet gingerly and pranced in dainty scorn of fatigue. In them as in their riders there seemed to dwell the paramount instinct of sportsmanship.

It was all very pleasant and full of charm: the charm of glad young summer and trimmed lawns and lengthening velvety shadows: of opulence and ease.

At the stone gateposts of her own grounds where honeysuckle clambered and where a little stream trickled down through the trimmed box-rows, her great Dane stood waiting to meet her, wriggling his tawny body as he waved his tail in greeting.

He lumbered about her and thrust up his huge muzzle to her cool fingers while his eyes glowed with an affection that gave a ludicrous lie to the ferocity of their reddened haws. When she handed him a glove to carry he set it gingerly between his leonine fangs and strutted at her side with the exaggerated pomp of a canine cake-walker.

"Danny Holland!" she suddenly exclaimed, and a choke came into her voice. "Roger gave you to me the same day he gave me my ring. That was a year ago and I was very happy. I'm not happy any more, Danny-dog, and you are the first person I've told about it. In that year you've grown up from a puppy, but in many years *he* hasn't grown at all."

She glanced about her, but she and the dog were between the shrubberies of the lawn and cut off from the turnpike by the tall box hedge. They were quite alone. Suddenly the girl dropped to her knees and

seized her great, clumsy confidant about his mastiff neck.

"I'm afraid — I'm terribly, sickeningly afraid, Danny Holland, he never will grow up — and so I'm going away to leave you both."

If the dog realized the true enormity of that threat, he masked his grief as a chivalric dog should mask his deeper emotions. He waved his tail with grave, unhurried dignity and thrust his head around to gaze sympathetically into his mistress's face. If for the moment he forgot his low caste and the high estate of the beautiful lady and allowed himself to caress her bowed chin with his big tongue, the impertinence may have been pardonable.

At all events she did not rebuke him. She only picked up the glove he had dropped and gave it back into his keeping. She dashed her hand self-contemptuously across her eyes and when she went into the door to dress for dinner no one could have guessed that a few minutes before she had been on the verge of tears.

. . . . . .

The moon was near her fullest argency that evening and the clambering roses nodded in her light in Juanita Holland's garden. Shadows laid black velvet patches across a stretch of silver gray.

From the nearest house, separated by grounds that were in reality small parks, came a happy chorus of young voices, and the songs that they sung were suited to the night; a night when spring fancies itself summer.

In the soft luminance and the dusky shadow-smudges

the girl and the man came out to a stone bench, and as Juanita Holland took her seat she fell for a moment into an attitude of drooping misery. Then immediately the shoulders that showed above her dark evening gown came back with a military stanchness and she held them so; as firm and white as ivory, and raised her chin resolutely. Malcolm, a wraith-like shape in his flannels, drew out a cigar and lighted it, and as the match died it caught a whimsical smile on his lips. With one foot on the stone bench and an elbow resting on his knee he began banteringly.

"So now it's the lecture, dearest, is it? Proceed. 'I've a heart for any fate.'"

"Have you?" She put the query quietly, almost listlessly, and after that she was silent for a moment. Then she drew the engagement ring from her finger and held it out to him. A little splinter of light was tossed from one of the facets.

"That's the first thing, Roger," she went on. "It isn't an easy thing either, but I've got to do it."

Her companion did not extend his hand. His face in the white light was suddenly rigid and stunned. At last he asked, pronouncing each word very carefully and distinctly, "Have you stopped loving me?"

The girl shook her head with the weariness of a long fought uncertainty.

"I wish I knew. But it isn't just a question of loving you, Roger. It's a question of marrying, too, and I can't marry you."

She could not help watching with an impersonal intentness how the fingers of the hand that drooped across his knee stiffened and opened and stiffened again and

how he studied them as if they were the fingers of another man.

"You have promised — and you promised of your own free will."

She nodded. He had spoken, not argumentatively, but as one gently reminding her of something which she had seemed to forget.

"I promised because I wanted to. If I refuse now it's not exactly because I want to."

"Then what is it?"

"It's a very hard thing to tell you. If it hurts you, it has hurt me, too, and hurt me rather terribly . . . the reason, Roger, is yourself."

"I suppose," he said with an effort, his voice still rather dazed and stunned, "there are a good many things the matter with me, but what particular fault do you find fatal? Of course you know —" his utterance suddenly grew fervent —"that if it's humanly possible I'll change it."

Again the shake of her head denoted the hopelessness of argument. "It's nothing that you *can* change. Perhaps the fault is altogether mine . . . perhaps I'm just the sort of girl that sees things wrong. . . . I was proud of you this afternoon on the polo field . . . but life isn't just a polo field." She leaned forward and her hands went out in a somewhat pathetic gesture. "You mustn't think it's easy for me. Maybe if I loved you it wouldn't matter what you were or what you weren't. Maybe I'm not capable of real love — but I've always *thought* I loved you. I have never loved any one else. I wonder if we've both been mistaken about it all the while."

"I haven't been mistaken," he denied indignantly. "There is no question about my love for you."

In the moon he saw that her lashes were wet.

"Of course," he very gravely went on, "I couldn't hold you to any promise that your heart repudiates. Of course there's no question of that, but can't you make it just a little clearer? Precisely how do I fall short?"

Juanita sat silently studying his pallid face and set jaw. Some men would have been reproachful. In his generous attitude he appeared almost at his best, and it was very hard to let him go.

She was already hurting him enough. How could she tell him what was in her mind? "You are the gentleman, polished and letter-perfect, yet you are not after all — quite a man."

She turned and gazed off at the sky which the stars would have made effervescent with their bubbles of splintered light had the moon not dimmed them. Her intertwined fingers were tightly locked and her words came slowly and with difficulty. They came not in her own phrases, but in quotation:

> "'That self-same instant, underneath,
> The Duke rode past in his idle way,
> Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.'"

There was a pause and her voice was very faint when she added:

"I want my husband not to be a swordless sheath."

The man nodded miserably and he asked, "Must I only ride past then, dear? Don't you remember other

lines a little further on? The Duke saw a woman and loved her —

> "'And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
> Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
> The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.'"

"The poet said so and yet —" she shook her head resolutely as if to shake away webs of clouding indecision —"and yet at the end of the poem he had done nothing."

Roger Malcolm moved a step toward her, then halted.

"Will you wait here a few minutes?" he begged. "It has all come so suddenly — I must try to think." She nodded and while from the bench she looked back, as she believed, on the ruins of all her life's air castles, she saw him pacing measuredly back and forth across the moonlit lawn. His hands were tight-held at his back and as he walked the great Dane shambled, with a sort of hulking stateliness, at his heels.

"It seems," he said, when he rejoined her, "that I have been weighed and found wanting. If it's a light matter to you — if it costs you nothing to exile me from your life, I suppose I should accept my sentence without whimpering. But how about *you?* You aren't the sort of woman who fancies herself in love only to forget it in an instant. What does it mean to you?"

The girl's lips parted, but for a moment no sound came from them except a little gasp. She covered her face with her hands and her response came faintly from behind her fingers. "I think that when *this* ends, my life ends. Afterwards it will be only existence."

At once he was kneeling by her side and had caught both her hands in his own, wresting them away from her face. His voice was now a-thrill once more with fervor. "Then you still love me! You love me whether you know it or not, and I'll not release you. . . . I know I've been weak in a hundred ways. I've never been hypocrite enough to deny that. . . . I know I'm self-indulgent and given to following the easiest course. . . . I've never had to fight to keep my head above water, but I'll change it all — everything. Give me the chance, dearest! Look at it fairly. Analyze yourself as well as me."

She smiled wistfully down into his eager face.

"You analyze me," she suggested.

"In your veins run two strains of blood," he began vehemently. "Your people have been soldiers and scholars. The soldiers have given you an exaggerated admiration for sheer untempered and unreasoning courage; the scholars have bequeathed you an over-balanced seriousness of thought. You grew up in a womanless family. You were mistress of your house when you were practically a baby. Since you were a little girl you were always with your grandfather, and your grandfather lived with abstractions for playmates to the day of his death."

"At least they were noble abstractions," she answered proudly.

"They were noble enough, but none the less abstractions. For example, a school in the far away Appalachian Mountains appeared a nearer concern to him than an honest city government here in Philadelphia. He educated you as he might have educated

a trained nurse or a medical missionary, stuffing your little head, too, with abstract things; you who had never dressed or undressed yourself without a maid! I believe in my heart the old gentleman had an idea that you could go down there single-handed into that God-forgotten wilderness and teach the bare-footed little feudists to read and write!"

"They need schools badly down there," she said thoughtfully. "I know that he wanted me to devote a good part of his fortune to giving their starved minds and souls a chance. I know that I am expected to be his stewardess in carrying on his work. I'm very proud of that."

"That's all right," argued the man stoutly. "It's splendid, but just the same it shows that your judgment may be a little warped, dearest, with a life spent so close to ideals that it's far away from facts. Perhaps it may make you a trifle unjust to the ordinary, every-day sort of man that just lives normally and tries to be fairly decent about it. We can't all be Cœur de Lions, you know."

"Do you know why my grandfather was so interested in those mountaineers?" she loyally defended. "Do you realize that for two hundred years the clearest strain of Anglo-Saxon blood in America has been cut off, isolated, and left to rot in those hills?"

"I'm arguing now," he reminded her, "for what is, to me, the most vital issue in life, and these men and women have nothing to do with that. Please, dear, let me at least have my day in court."

From across the way came the gay chorus of the young people's song, contralto and bass and tenor, but

by the stone bench there was silence. Malcolm had risen and stood waiting, and finally Juanita spoke again low and seriously.

"Those men and women *have* something to do with you, Roger. . . . This isn't a sudden decision. . . . I've fought it all out in my own mind and the verdict has been hard to reach, but it's reached now and it's final. All you say may be true. I may have taken too serious a view, but it's my view. Yet I've danced and ridden and played tennis and polo as much as any other girl. I've laughed as often, and as light-heartedly as any of them and I haven't been altogether without a sense of humor."

"You're the best sportswoman in the world; you have the keenest sense of humor in the world and you're altogether the most delectable girl in the world — but you aren't precisely infallible. Perhaps even your judgment of me is not infallible."

"I'm very fallible, but for six months I've been pondering this question. We're not meant for each other, Roger. There's no escaping it. If there had been I'd have escaped. I've been running here and there, looking wildly for a loop-hole . . . but now I know there is none. You asked me what giving you up means to me. I'll tell you. If I'd lived some centuries ago I'd have betaken me to a nunnery. I can't go on living in our world without you. I admit that freely, dear."

"Thank God you didn't live several centuries ago," came his fervent exclamation. "And you don't have to live without me."

Juanita shook her head again, the wistful smile

deepened her eyes and twisted one corner of her lips.

"And so," she added suddenly, "I'm going to betake me to a more useful sort of nunnery, Roger, dear. I'm going to betake me to the Cumberland Mountains, to teach the 'bare-footed little feudists' how to read and write and wash their faces and comb their hair. I'm going to try to teach them to forget some things they already know; principally assassination from ambush."

. . . . . .

CHAPTER II

FOR just an instant Roger Malcolm stood transfixed with amazement. When his voice came it was as charged with dumfounded incredulity as his attitude.

"The Cumberland Mountains? You?" he questioned dully.

"Yes."

With the passionate vehemence of one struggling to break a paralyzing spell he was at her side and had swept her into his arms. His excitement tensed his muscles so fiercely that as the girl fluttered vainly in his grasp she gave a low exclamation of pain. The mastiff, deeply puzzled and torn between two allegiances, growled deep in his throat and took a stiff-legged step forward while the bristles rose along his quarters.

"By God, you shall do nothing of the sort!" Malcolm spoke in a hoarse whisper. "It's too damnably absurd. You are not going. Do you hear me? You are not going!"

"Please let me go,— you are hurting me," she said quietly and he found himself standing back and suddenly trembling, for as her face had almost brushed his, he had read her eyes and knew that in the end all argument would fail.

"My mind is finally made up," she reiterated gently.

"That, too, is a thing I've been weighing and pondering these last six months."

"And mine is made up, too." He leaned forward and for just a moment thrilled her with a new command of pose and voice. "As God lives I sha'n't let you go. You're throwing my life away as well as your own, and I don't mean to let you do it."

"Don't you?" The girl stood leaning against a stone coping and just a hint of hope that she had underestimated him stole flickeringly into her pupils. "If you can stop me, do it. That will prove that the sheath is really filled with 'a blade for a knight's emprise.'"

But even as he stood there in the moonlight with her eyes fixed on him the set of his jaw and resolute dominance of his eye melted into suffering of hopelessness which she ached to comfort. On the heels of fierce command followed expostulation and pleading.

"Juanita, your grandfather never meant that you should go into that lawless hell. He meant you to be the directing mind, not the laborer in the field. It's a life of squalor and dreariness. It would kill you."

He paused, then rushed on in headlong dissuasion. "Your life has been the normal life of your sort; of ease and play and of a deliciously rhythmic personality. This idea is absurdly incongruous. It is madness."

"Is that the way you are going to stop me?" she queried a little scornfully. "You say I have the blood of soldiers and scholars. The combination ought to give a touch of the crusader, don't you think?"

"For a hundred years, dearest, courts and juries

and the bayonets of militiamen have struggled to tame and civilize those barbaric people, and for a hundred years they have utterly failed. There is one god down there and his name is Implacable Hatred."

"Don't you think it's almost time they had another God? I sha'n't go with juries or bayonets."

"You would have to go without knowing them, with no knowledge of their ways, their point of view."

"I don't know them now, but I will know them."

"You haven't even a letter of introduction."

"I never heard," her voice rang with a note against which he knew the futility of argument, "that the Saviour needed letters of introduction."

She had moved out of the shadow now and the moonlight fell on her white shoulders and the slender neck that held her little head so fearlessly poised. From the hair that the soft light kissed to the tips of her satin slippers she was delicate, exquisite and flower-like. The pearls on her throat rose and fell with the agitation of her breathing, but her eyes were as steady in their straight-gazing resolve as were ever the eyes of Jeanne d'Arc. The man whose blood was scalding his temples knew that he had lost and that she would go.

"You are carried away with the hallucination of an exalted mission," he protested. "They are not worth it. Only yesterday I was reading in a paper the biography of one of their feud leaders, a man named 'Bad Anse' Havey. He has not even the excuse of illiteracy. He has served in the State Assembly and he holds his minions in the hollow of his blood-stained hand. He lives like a murder lord, dealing out sen-

tences of death at will, while all the power of the State seems helpless to curb him."

"I read about him, too," she said, "and the fact that such a man can wield power like that is only the greater reason for carrying to them a better code."

"You sha'n't go," he reiterated. "You sha'n't!"

"Stop me then, Roger dear," she said slowly. "At all events I'm not going to-night. It's getting chilly out here. Let's go indoors."

. . . . . .

The leaves of poplar and oak hung still and limp, for no ghost of breeze found its way down there to stir them into movement or whisper. Banks of rhododendron breaking into a foam of bloom gave the seeming of green and whitecaped waves arrested and solidified by some sudden paralysis of nature. Sound itself appeared dead, save for hushed minors that only accentuated the stillness of the Cumberland forest.

There was the low buzz of a bumble bee hanging near the chalice of the catalpa's blossom and a drowsy cadence drifting from the green-blanketed slopes of the mountains; the plaintive call of the nesting dove.

Even the little waters that slipped and shimmered over a shaly creek bed, crept noiselessly down to their destiny of feeding rivers as though their mission was surreptitious.

Now as evening sent her warning with gathering shadows that began to lurk in the valleys, two mounted figures, traveling that way, made no sound either save when a hoof splashed on a slippery surface or saddle leather creaked under the patient scrambling of their animals.

In front rode a battered mountaineer astride a rusty-brown mule. He himself was as rusty and brown as his beast, and to casual sight as spiritless. Lean shoulders sagged and a thin, weary-eyed face was thrust forward on a long, collarless neck with something suggestive of a turtle's head in its aquiline contour. His clothing, from shapeless hat to unlaced brogans, was sun-gnawed and wind-bitten into absolute neutrality of color. His uncertain age might have been anything except young — for he had crossed the boundary where a mountaineer bids an early farewell to youth and goes under the aging yoke of hardship and drudgery.

The second figure came some yards behind, carefully following in his wake on a mule which limped and drooped its head because it had cast its shoe in the morning and toiled over mountains all day through a smithless territory.

But it was the figure itself which would have arrested observation with its seeming contradiction to the environment. It had startled into quaint exclamation those men and women in jeans and linsey-woolsey who had appeared now and then in tilting cornfields along the mountain-sides. They had "rested their hoes" and stood at gaze, for the second mule bore a woman, riding astride. She was a young woman, and if just now her slender shoulders also drooped a little, still even in their droop they hinted at a gallant grace of carriage.

The girl was very slender and though convoyed by the drab missionary, "Good Anse" Talbott, though astride a lame mule and accoutered with saddle-bags and blanket roll, her clothes were not of mountain

calico, but of good fabric, and skillfully tailored, and she carried her head differently. There was unconscious pride of race and purpose in the uptilt of that girl's chin, and though now she was very tired and her delicately curving lips fell into a somewhat pathetic droop; though her eyes wore a hint of furrow between their brows, still the lips were subtly and sweetly carved by their Creator and the eyes were worthy mirrors for the sky high above the topmost crest of the ridges.

Indubitably this was a "furriner," one of those women from the other world of Down-below; the world that lay beyond the ridges to the east and west, of which the hill people had only a vague conception. She was an outlander to be, at first glance, viewed with the suspicion that resents the coming of innovation to a land which has long stood unaltered and unalterable. But who was she and why had she come?

Yet, had she known it, word had gone ahead of her and been duly reported to the one man who knew things hereabouts; who made it a point to know things, and whose name stood as a challenge to innovation in the mountains. When at morning she had started out from the shack town at the end of the rails "Bad Anse" Havey's informers had ridden not far behind her. Later they had pushed ahead and relayed their message to their chief.

Like one of the untamable eagles that circled the windy crests of his mountains, Anse Havey watched, with eyes that could gaze unblinking into the sun, all men who came and went through the highlands where his eyrie perched. Those whom he hated, unless they,

too, were of the eagle breed, fierce and resourceful and strong of talon, could not remain there. And with strong wings as well as strong talons he and his sort laughed at all law which they did not themselves make and fancied themselves above it — creatures of the heights.

This slender young woman, astride a mule, was coming as the avowed outrider of a new order. She meant to wage war on the whole fabric of illiteracy and squalid ignorance which lay entrenched here. Consequently her arrival would interest Bad Anse Havey.

Once that day when they had stopped at a wayside mill to let their mules pant at the water-trough, she had caught a scrap of conversation that was not meant for her ears; a scrap laughingly tossed from bearded lip to bearded lip among the hickory-shirted loiterers at the mill door.

"Reckon thet thar's the fotched-on woman what aims ter start a school over on the head of Tribulation," drawled one native; "I heered tell of her t'other day."

With a somewhat derisive laugh another had contributed,

"Mebby she hain't talked thet projeck over with Bad Anse yit. Reckon he don't 'low ter tolerate no sich foolery es thet."

As she had stiffened in her saddle with resentment and fighting spirit a third voice had pensively volunteered the suggestion: "Hit mout be a right-good idee fer thet gal ter go on back down below, whar she b'longs at."

The girl was thinking of all that now as she rode in

the wake of her silent escort. Muscles which had never before proclaimed themselves were waking into a rack of pain in her back and neck and limbs and it is difficult to be gallant and resolute when one is tired. Suddenly it seemed to her that she bore on the shoulders of a girl fresh from college, and reared to ease, a burden which Atlas should be hefting.

They came ploddingly to a higher strip of road, and she clutched at her pommel and swayed a little in her saddle under a dizzying wave of physical exhaustion. Now the mountains opened from their choking closeness and ahead lay a broad vista.

Even the sprays of elder and the flare of the trumpet flower carried a color note of weed-like lawlessness. That such lawlessness as held these hills locked in its grip could exist in her century had always seemed to her incredible. Now the sun was sinking into a bank of somber clouds through a rift in the ridges, and the clouds were crimsoned at their marges as though with the blood of this people's ferocity. Why had the potent wave of civilization always broken here in shattered foam? This morning she had asked herself that question. This afternoon, she looked at the mountains and the mountains were the answer. There they stood before her rock-ribbed and titanic. They were beautiful beyond words, but unshakably sullen and inexpressibly grim. These were the hills she had come to change; hills fixed and invincible; hills that had halted and deflected the restless flow of civilization as armor plate might turn a rocket's fire.

They had nourished mediævalism unaltered through two centuries; they had been ancient when the Alps

and Himalayas yet slept in the womb of the sea; old before the Andes were conceived! And as she rode her hobbling mule into their depths with wilting confidence, it seemed to her that the human incarnation of this great lawlessness stood mocking her in the fierce, contemptuous visage which her imagination had painted as that of Bad Anse Havey. Here was a desperado, defying all law whom a sovereign commonwealth could not or would not rise and crush.

In a moment of almost cringing despair she wished indeed that she were "back thar down below whar she b'longed at."

Then almost fiercely drawing back her aching shoulders, she cast her eyes about on the darkening coves and the creeping shadows of the broad panorama from which came no thread of smoke, no sign of human habitation and raised her voice in anxious inquiry. "How much further do we have to go?"

The man riding ahead did not turn his face, but flung his answer apathetically backward over his shoulder. "We got to keep right on twell we comes ter a dwellin'-house. I'm aimin' fer old man Fletch McNash's cabin a leetle ther rise of a mile frum hyar. I 'low mebby he mout shelter us twell mornin'."

"And if he doesn't?" demanded the girl.

"Ef he doesn't we've got ter ride on a spell further."

The girl closed her eyes for a moment and pressed her lip between her teeth.

At last a sudden turn in the road brought to view a wretched patch of bare clay circled by a dilapidated paling fence within which gloomed a squalid and un-

lighted cabin of logs. At sight of its desolation, the girl's heart sank. No note of cheery light gave comfort to her weariness. A square hovel, windowless and obviously of one room, held up a wretched lean-to that sagged drunkenly against its end. The open door was merely a patch of greater darkness in the gray picture. Behind it loomed the mountain like a crouching Colossus.

At first she thought it an abandoned shack, but as they drew rein near the stile which one must cross into the yard and which a gnarled sycamore shaded, a dark object lazily rose, resolving itself into a small boy of perhaps eleven, who had been sitting hunched up there at gaze with his hands clasped around his thin knees.

As he came to his feet, he revealed a thin stature swallowed up in a hickory shirt and an over-ample pair of butternut trousers that had evidently come down in honorable heritage from elder brethren. His small face wore a sharp, prematurely old expression, as he stood staring up at the new arrivals and hitching at the single "gallus" which supported the family breeches.

"Airy one o' ye folks got a chaw o' terbaccy?" he demanded tersely, then added in plaintive after-note, "I hain't had a chaw ter-day."

"Sonny," announced the colorless mountaineer with equal succinctness, "we want ter be took in. We're benighted."

"Ye mout axe Fletch," was the stolid reply, "only he hain't hyar. . . . Hes airy one o' ye folks got a chaw o' terbaccy?"

"I don't chaw, ner drink, ner smoke," answered the

horseman quietly, with the manner of one who teaches by precept. "I'm a preacher of ther Gawspel. Air ye Fletch's boy?"

"Huh-huh. Hain't thet woman got no terbaccy nuther?"

Evidently whatever other characteristics went into this youth's nature he was admirably gifted with tenacity and singleness of purpose. Juanita Holland smiled, as she shook her head and replied, "I'm a woman and I don't use tobacco."

"The hell ye don't!" The boy paused, then added scornfully, "My mammy chaws and smokes, too — but she don't straddle no hoss." After that administration of rebuke he deigned once more to recognize the missionary's insistent queries, though with the laconic impatience of extreme ennui.

"I tell ye Fletch hain't hyar." The boy started disgustedly away, but paused in passing to jerk his head toward the house and added, "Ye mout axe thet woman ef ye've a mind ter."

The travelers raised their eyes and saw a second figure standing with hands on hips staring at them from the distance. It was the slovenly figure of a woman, clad in a colorless and shapeless skirt and an equally shapeless jacket which hung unbelted about her thick waist. As she came slowly forward the girl began to take in other details. The woman was barefooted and walked with a shambling gait which made Juanita think of bears pacing their barred enclosures in a zoo. Her face was hard and unsmiling, and the wrinkles about her eyes were those of anxious and lean years, but the eyes themselves were not unkind.

Her lips were tight clamped on the stem of a clay pipe.

"Evenin', ma'am," began the mountaineer. "I'm Good Anse Talbott. I reckon mebby ye've heered tell of me. This lady is Miss Holland from down below. I 'lowed Flech mout let us tarry hyar till sun-up."

"I reckon he mout — ef he war hyar, though we don't foller takin' in strangers," was the dubious reply; "but he hain't hyar."

"Where air he at?"

"Don't know. Didn't ye see him down the road as ye rid along?"

"Wall, now —" drawled the missionary, "I hain't skeercely as well acquainted hyarabouts as further up Tribulation. What manner o' lookin' man air he?"

"He don't look like nothin' much," replied his wife morosely. "He's jest an ornery-lookin' old man."

"Whither did he sot out ter go when he left hyar?"

The woman shook her head, then a grim flash of latent wrath broke in her eyes.

"I'll jest let ye hev the truth, stranger. Some triflin' fellers done sa'ntered past hyar with a jug of licker, an' thet fool Fletch hes jest done follered 'em off. Thet's all thar is to hit an' he hain't got no license ter ack thetaway nuther. I reckon by now he's a-layin' drunk somewhars."

For a moment there was silence through which drifted the distant tinkle of cowbells down the creek. Beyond the crests lingered only a lemon afterglow as relict of the dead day. The brown, colorless man astride his mule sat stupidly looking down at the brown colorless woman across the stile. The waiting girl

heard the preacher surmising that "mebby he'd better sot out in s'arch of Fletch." The words seemed to come from a great distance and her head swam giddily. Then overcome with disgust and weariness, Juanita Holland saw the afterglow turn slowly to pale gray and then to black shot through with orange spots. She grew suddenly indifferent to the situation. She swayed in her saddle and slipped limply to the ground. The young woman who had come to conquer the mountains and carry a torch of enlightenment to their illiteracy, had fainted from heartsickness and weariness at the threshold of her invasion.

CHAPTER III

THE weariness which caused the fainting spell must have lengthened its duration, for when Juanita's lashes flickered upward again and her brain came gropingly back to consciousness she was no longer out by the stile. Yet there could not have been a great interval either for now as the girl looked up the parallelogram of a door frame showed that though the twilight was dying the twilight's ghost still lingered. At the top of the opening was yet a streak of afterglow, paling and graying, and over it hung a single, diamond-clear star.

She noticed that detail before she became aware of nearer things. Gradually consciousness ceased to be fragmentary. She was lying in the smothering softness of a feather bed. On her palate and tongue lingered an unfamiliar, sweetish taste, while through her veins she felt the coursing of a warm glow. Over her stood the woman who had been across the stile when she fainted. Her attitude was anxiously watchful. In one hand she held a stone jug, and in the other a gourd dipper. So that accounted for the taste and the glow, and as Juanita took in the circumstance she heard the high nasal voice, pitched none the less in a tone of kindly reassurance.

"Ye'll be spry as a squirrel in a leetle spell, honey. Don't fret yoreself none. Ye war jest plumb tuckered

out an' ye swooned. I've been a rubbin' yore hands an' a pourin' a little white licker down yore throat. Don't worrit yoreself none. We're pore folks an' we hain't got much, but I reckon we kin mek out ter enjoy ye somehow."

The four walls of the cabin might have been the rocky confines of a mountain cavern, so completely did they merge into the impalpable and sooty murk that hung between them, obliterating all remoter outline. Only things in a narrow circle grew visible and at the center of this lighted area was the slender figure of a girl, holding up a lard taper, whose radius of light was yellow and flickering.

The girl on the bed smiled and murmured her thanks, and as the other girl, younger and unspeakably shy, felt the eyes of the strange woman from the great unknown world upon her, her own dark lashes fell timidly and the hand that held the taper trembled, while into her cheeks crept a carmine self-consciousness. She was looking at the most beautiful creature she had ever seen, and the diffidence with which her isolated little life had been always fettered grew as poignant as though she were in the presence of some rare and superior being. And Juanita, for her part, felt in her veins a new and subtler glow than that which the moonshine whiskey had quickened. The men and women of the hills had made her heart-sick with their stolid and animal-like coarseness. Now she saw a slender figure in which the lines were yet transitory between the straightness of childhood and the budding curves of womanhood. She saw a well-borne head surmounted by a mass of tangled hair which the taper lighted into

an aureole about a face delicately beautiful. The lips were poppy-red and the eyes were as blue as her own, while below the ragged hem of the short calico skirt bare and slender feet twisted with the restless shyness of a fawn's.

It was to such children of the hills as this that Juanita Holland was to bring the new teachings. But even as she smiled, the child, for she seemed to be only fifteen or sixteen, surrendered to her shyness and thrusting the taper into her mother's hand, shrunk out of sight in some shadowed corner of the place.

Then Juanita's eyes occupied themselves with what fragmentary details the faint light revealed. There was something like a rough stone grotto which she knew to be the fireplace. The barrel of a rifle caught the weak flare and glittered. The uncarpeted floor of rude puncheon slabs was a thing of gaping cracks, and overhead there was a vague feeling of low rafters from which hung strings of ancient and shriveled peppers and a few crinkled "hands" of "natural leaf." But as her senses wakened she was most conscious of a reek such as that which clings about a shed where hams are cured; the reek of a windowless house in which the chimney has smoked until the timbers are darkened.

"Dawn," commanded the woman, "take yore foot in yore hand an' light out ter ther barn an' see ef ye kin find some aigs." Then as Juanita watched the door she caught a glimpse of a slight figure that vanished with the same quick noiselessness as that with which a beaver slips into water.

"I reckon ye kin jest lay thar a spell," apologized

the woman, "whilst I goes out an' see what victuals I kin skeer up."

Left alone, the girl from Philadelphia ran over the events of the day and seemed to smother under a weight of squalor and foreboding. The taper had gone with the hostess and even the door darkened with the thickening of twilight. Once or twice she heard the surreptitious fall of a cautious bare foot, and though at first she could see nothing she knew that one of the children of the household had crept in to lie fascinatedly gazing toward her from one of the other beds. As her eyes slowly accustomed themselves to the darkness until their widening pupils could recognize degrees of pitchiness — separating comparative from superlative — she could make them out, in strange immovable little shapes of black. Even in their idle curiosity there was that note which had all day been growing to an obsession with her; the note which strikes the stranger in the hills, of never ending and grim suspense; of being constantly watched and followed by unseen eyes.

At length from the road came loud shouts of drunken laughter broken by the evident remonstrances of a companion who sought to enjoin quiet, and by these tokens the "furrin" woman knew that the lord of the squalid manor was returning, and that he was coming under convoy. She shrunk from an immediate meeting with Fletch McNash whose ribald laughter proclaimed his condition, but if she went out by the only door she knew, she would have to confront him, so she lay still, shrinking with distaste as she heard her hostess berating the delinquent consort, and heard also the interjec-

tions of another voice whose words she could not catch, so low pitched and quiet was the manner of their utterance.

Fletch had been deposited in one of the split-bottom chairs about the broken mill-stone which served in lieu of a doorstep, and palpably his drink had left him mellow and genial, beyond vulnerability to badgering.

"I jest went over thar ter borry a hoe," he exculpated. "An' I met up with some fellers thet wouldn't hardly leave me go. Thar was all manner of free licker. They had white licker an' bottled-in-bond licker an' none of hit didn't cost nothin'. Them fellers jest wouldn't hardly suffer me ter come away."

"An' whilest ye war a-soakin' up thet thar free licker them potater sets was a-dryin' up, waitin' ter be sot out," came the ironical wifely reminder.

"I knows thet. I hadn't hardly ought ter of did hit — but them fellers they jest wouldn't hardly suffer me ter leave thar."

"Well," the woman's voice was contemptuous, "I jest took them pertater sets an' flung 'em in ther crick. Next time mebby ye'll know better."

"Aw, pshaw! ole woman," Fletch's voice was unruffled, "ye didn't do no sich of a fool thing. Ye're jest a-lyin'."

Between the strident voices, came every now and then the softly modulated tones of the stranger whose words Juanita lost. Yet somehow whenever she heard their cadence, she felt soothed, and after each of these utterances the woman outside also spoke in softer tones.

Whoever the stranger was, he carried in his voice

a reassuring quality, so that without having seen him the girl felt that in his presence there was an element of strength and safeguarding.

At last from one of the beds she heard a scuffling sound and a moment later a childish form opened a door at the back of the cabin and slipped out into the darkness.

That revealed an avenue of escape. Juanita had not known that these windowless cabins are usually supplied with two doors and that the one into which the wind does not drive stands open for light on winter days. Now she, too, rose noiselessly and went out of the close and musty room. It was quite dark out there and she could feel, rather than see the densely foliaged side of the mountain that loomed upward at her back.

Off to one side she could make out, by virtue of lantern-glow between its cracks, the barn, where some one was still busy with the stock.

All about her was impenetrable murk and she sank down on a large rock which she found in her path. She was wrapped in the depressing contemplation of the task which lay ahead of her, and its stark contrast with all which lay behind her, so that, in her brooding, she lost account of time. The voices at the front seemed now to have died into the same universal silence which held the mountains throttled, and the night chorus had not yet opened. Evidently no one had missed her from the cabin. At last she heard a voice sing out from the stile.

"I'm Jim White, an' I'm a-comin' in."

A thick welcome from Fletch McNash followed and

then again silence settled except for the weird strain of a banjo which one of the children was thrumming inside. The banjo carried to the Eastern girl's heart a sense of lost soul isolation and eerie loneliness, for the fingers that nursed its strings were slowly picking out one of those mournful ballads which have filtered down from the Scotland of Mary Stuart, and which have survived nowhere else than in this desolate stronghold of the dead ages.

After a while as she sat there on her rock, with her chin disconsolately in her hand, and her elbows on her knees, Juanita became conscious of footsteps and knew that some one was coming toward her. Whoever the person or persons were the approach was very quiet and at first she heard only the light crackle of chips and twigs as they passed the chopping block in the woodpile, but in another moment she caught the calm voice which had already impressed her; the voice of the stranger who had brought home the half-helpless house-holder.

"I reckon we're out of earshot now. I reckon we kin hev speech here, but heed your voice an' talk low."

In the face of such a preface the girl shrank back with fresh panic. She had no wish to overhear private conversation. She could think of nothing she dreaded more than to be the recipient of any of the dark secrets with which these hills seemed to be honey-combed. If either one of the two men who were only shadows bulked a little blacker than the general darkness, should light a pipe, she would stand forth revealed with all the guilty seeming of an eavesdropper.

She huddled back against the rock and cast an anx-

ious glance about her for a way to escape. Behind lay the mountain wall with its jungle-like growth, where her feet would sound an alarm of rustling branches and disturbed deadwood. But the men were strolling near her and to try to reach the house would require crossing their path.

Then the second shadow spoke and its voice carried, beside the nasal shrillness so common to the hills, the tenseness of suppressed excitement.

"Thar's liable ter be hell ter-night."

The girl thought that the quiet stranger laughed, though of that she could not be certain.

"I reckon ye mean concernin' Cal Douglas?"

"Thet's hit, whin I rid outen Peril this a'ternoon ther Jury hed done took ther case an' everybody 'lowed they'd find a verdict afore sundown."

"I reckon," the taller of the two men answered slowly, and into his softly modulated voice crept something of flinty finality. "I reckon I can tell ye what that verdict's goin' to be. Cal will come clear."

"Thet hain't ther p'int," urged the messenger excitedly. "Thet hain't why I've rid over hyar like a bat outen hell ter cotch up with ye. I was aimin' ter fotch word over ter ther dance, but es I come by hyar, I seen yore hoss hitched out thar in ther road so I lit an' come in. . . . I reckon ye knows thet Co'te an' thet Jury. Thet's *yore* business, but *thet* hain't all."

"Well, what's the balance of it? Talk out. What are ye aimin' to tell me?"

"I met up with a feller in Job Heath's blind tiger jest outside Peril. He'd drunk a lot of licker an' he got ter talking mighty loose-tongued an' free." The

girl sickened a little as she felt that her fears were being realized, and one hand went involuntarily up to her breast and stayed there. The young man with the shrill voice talked on impetuously.

"Ever sence the trial of Cal Douglas started good, old Milt McBriar hain't been actin' like his-self. Him an' Breck Havey's been stoppin' at ther same *ho*tel in Peril an' yit Milt hain't 'peared ter be a-bearin' no grudge whatsoever. When ther Jury was med up, Milt didn't seek ter challenge fellers thet everybody knowed was friends of Cal's. Milt didn't even seek ter raise no hell when ther Jedge ruled favorable ter Cal right along. This feller what I talked ter, 'lowed thet Milt didn't *keer* ef Cal came cl'ar."

The listening man once more answered with a quiet laugh. "Do ye 'low that that old rattlesnake, Milt McBriar, aims to stand by an' not *try* ter hang or penitentiary kin of mine for killin' kin of his?" he inquired almost softly.

"Thet's just hit," the answer came quickly and excitedly. "This feller 'lowed thet old Milt aimed ter show ther world thet he couldn't git no jestice in a Co'te thet b'longed ter Anse Havey, an' then he aimed ter 'tend ter his own jestice fer hisself. He 'lows ter hev hit home-made."

CHAPTER IV

"HOW is he aimin' to fix it?" The question was a bit contemptuous.

"They figger thet when Cal comes cl'ar, he'll ride lickety-split, with a bunch of Havey boys over hyar ter this dance what's a-goin' forward at ther p'int. Some of Milt's fellers aims ter slip over thar, too, an' while Cal's celebratin' they aims ter git him ter-night."

"Do they?" The taller man's voice was velvety. "Well, go on. What else?"

"They aims ter tell ther world thet they let thet law take hit's co'se fust, but thet Bad Anse Havey makes a mockery of ther law. This feller I talked with was jest a boy an' ther licker hed made him brag mighty heedless. I let on like I was State's evidence, same es him an' he told me everything he knew. He 'lowed thet the Haveys were aimin' ter make this dance a big celebration — an' thet Old Milt aimed ter give 'em somethin' ter celebrate right an' proper."

For a moment there was silence, and then the quiet voice commented ironically: "My God, them fellers lay a heap of deviltry up against Bad Anse, don't they?"

After a moment of silence, through which Juanita Holland was painfully conscious of the quick beat of her own heart, she heard again the unexcited voice of

the tall stranger. Now it was the capable voice of a general officer giving commands.

"Did ye give warnin' in Peril?"

"No — I couldn't get ter speak with Cal. He was in co'te — and seein' as how they didn't figger on raisin' no hell twell they git over hyar — I didn't turn backwards. I come straight through. I 'lowed this was ther place ter fix things up."

"You ride over to the dancin' party. Get the older fellers together. . . . Keep the boys quiet an' sober . . . cold sober. Watch thet old fool, Bob McGreeger. Don't spread these tidings till I get there. . . . If Cal comes over there tell him to keep outen sight. Nothin' won't break loose before midnight. . . . That's my orders. By God Almighty, I aim to have peace hereabout just now." The speaker's voice broke off and the two men passed out of sight around the corner of the house.

The girl rose and made her way unsteadily to the back door and let herself in. She threw herself on the bed and lay there rapidly thinking. It was obvious that her absence had not been commented upon. A few minutes later she heard the voice of Mrs. McNash singing out, "You folks kin all come in an' eat," and found herself, outwardly calm, making her way around to the shed addition which served jointly as kitchen and dining-room.

When she entered the place Fletch McNash was already seated and sagged over his plate with the stupid inertia of dulled senses. Gone now was his hilarity and in its place was come the sleepy heaviness of reaction. Even the sight of the "fotched-on woman"

elicited from him only a thickly muttered and incoherent comment.

At the center of the miserable lean-to stood a home-made table covered with red oil-cloth and nondescript crockery. Light came from the roaring blaze of the open hearth over which with pioneer make-shift the cookery had gone forward. In the yellow and vermilion flare of the logs, the walls appeared to advance and recede in tune to the upleapings of flame. Huddling as far into the shadow of a corner as possible sat the girl, Dawn, like a pink laurel-blossom in a sooty place. Above her head hung several "sides of meat," and at her feet was a pile of potatoes and onions.

But Juanita dismissed with a quick view those figures she had seen before. To Fletch McNash she accorded a glance of veiled disgust. She found herself unaccountably eager to see the tall stranger whose voice had reassured her; who had appeared first as the Samaritan bringing home the helpless; then as the man whose words gained prompt obedience — and finally as the self-declared advocate of peace.

He was standing, as she entered, a little back from the hearth, with the detached air of one who drops into the background or comes to the fore with equal readiness. She found that in appearance as in voice he bore a rough sort of impressiveness about him. In the brighter light stood the messenger, a gaunt youth in whose wild, sharp features lurked cunning, cruelty and endurance. But the other man, who stood a head taller, fell into a pose of indolent ease which might wake instantly into power.

On his clear-cut, rather lean face was a calm which

seemed remote from even the memory of excitement. From a breadth of shoulder he tapered wedge-like to the waist and was knit with none of the shambling looseness that Juanita had come to associate with the Cumberland type. In clothing he was much like the rest, except that in a rather indefinable way he escaped their seeming of slouchiness. She wondered where she had seen some portrait that wore as his face did roughness combined with dignity: crudeness with gentleness.

It was a face strongly and ruggedly chiseled, but so dominated by unfaltering, gray eyes that one was apt to forget all else, and carry away only a memory of dark hair — and those eyes. Now as the girl met their steady gaze, her own fell before it, yet she had caught a feeling that although she had never looked into such cool pupils there lay back of them a strong impression of banked and sleeping fires.

"No I kain't hardly tarry," she heard the messenger declaring in his nasal, high-pitched voice. "I reckon I've got ter be gone."

As Juanita made her way to a chair at the rough table the woman was saying in that old idiom of the hills, which springs from days when matches were unknown and dead fires must needs be rekindled from a neighbor's hearth, "What's yore tormentin' haste, Jim? Ye acts like ye'd done come ter borry fire."

"I'm a leetle-bit oneasy," interposed the tall man quietly, "lest those boys over at the dance might git quarrelsome with licker, and I want Jim to ride over an' keep an' eye on 'em till I git there. A dancin' party ought rightly to be peaceable."

Then as they sat at table and the girl struggled

with her discomfiture over each unclean detail of the food, she raised her eyes from time to time, always to encounter upon her the steady, appraising gaze of the dark stranger. In the desultory conversation of the table he took no part, but sat as taciturn and as wrapped about with his own thoughts as some warrior of the Indians from whom his forefathers had wrested these hills and from whom they had, to their shame, learned their ethics of warfare.

When they had finished, the stranger drew Fletch, now somewhat sobered by his meal, aside and the other men retired to the chairs in the door-yard. Then the girl from the East again slipped away and took up her solitary place on the top of the stile, where she sat thinking. The group about the door seemed a long way off as their droning voices drifted to her in the dark.

Slowly the smothering blackness of the barriers began to lighten. Beyond the eastern crests showed the pale mistiness of silver which was precursor to the moon. Stars that gleamed between the peaks like diamond splinters grew less intensely clear. Then the flat and pitchy curtain of night took faint form. The edge of the moon peeped stealthily over the ridge and after that the moon itself began to soar and work magic changes. The black void out in front became a silvery little valley through which the soft mirroring ribbon of Tribulation caught and turned top-down the lacelike fringe of the timber. Great shapeless masses modeled themselves into clear-cut monuments of cobalt. Giant plumes of pines and patterns of oak swam into sight and the hollows were dream-wrapped pools of softened

moon-mist. Then as though in answer to the miracle that had transformed the hopeless death of the night into the tender nocturne of grays and silvers and dream-blues, there boomed from the edges of the creek the chorus of the full-throated frogs and from behind in wooded slopes floated that plaintive note which, once known, leaves the ache of an unfulfilled desire over all countries where it does not sound; the call of the whip-poorwill.

Under these influences Juanita Holland was feeling unspeakably soothed. The sick squalor and lawlessness of the hills seemed, for the moment, less important than their serene beauty. After all where Nature smiled like this, where from heavens and forests came such a caress and benediction as moon-mist and starlight were pouring over her, things could not be irretrievably bad.

There were blossom girls like little Dawn to be won away from weed-wildness and taught. There were young men like the eagle-eyed stranger who raised their voices to declare as she had heard him declare, "I aim to have peace hyarabouts." Somehow she felt that what that voice announced, that man would do.

At last she was conscious of a presence besides her own, as of some one standing silently at her back.

Rather nervously she turned her head and there with one foot on the lower step of the stile stood the young stranger himself. Once more their eyes met and with a little start she dropped her own. She was not one who ordinarily failed to sustain any glance, however direct, and a sense of challenge usually brought to her chin that upward tilt and to her pupils that faint flash

under which the other eyes fell away. Yet somehow now, though she felt a half-mocking challenge and a premonition of personal duel in his gaze, it was she who surrendered.

She saw his horse, hitched outside, raise its head and whinny as though in welcome to its master, and then she looked back, and the mountaineer's steady appraising gaze was still fixed on her face, seeming to penetrate her thoughts.

"I kinder hate to bother ye, ma'am," said the even voice, "but I can't hardly get acrost thet stile whilst ye're settin' on it."

There was no note of badinage or levity in his voice and his clear-drawn features under the moonlight were entirely serious.

Juanita rose. "I beg your pardon," she said hastily as she went down the stile on the far side.

"Thet's all right, ma'am," replied the man easily, still with a serious dignity as he, too, crossed to the road.

While he was untying the knot in his bridle rein the girl stood watching him. In the easy indolence of his movements was the rippling quality that suggested the leopard's frictionless strength. Inside, when she had seen him standing by the hearth, she had been impressed, but his eyes had so fascinated her that the rest of her scrutiny had been insufficient and unsatisfactory. Now in the moonlight and the breeze she felt cooler, steadier, more analytical.

Even the raw-looking messenger had in an inferior way struck her with a note of the individual, and she had satisfied herself with the reflection that both these

men differed from all the men of her own world because her acquaintances had gone under the leveling and softening influences of the conventional. They were smoother and more alike while these more primitive men were types, each standing forth with something of the sternness of their native crags.

The very quality that gave this young stranger his picturesqueness and stamped him as vital and dynamic in his manhood, sprang from that wild roughness which he shared with his eagles and Dawn shared with her weedlike flowers. And yet it was somehow as though the man, whose voice was so calm, whose movements so quiet, whose gaze so un-arrogant, were crying out in a clarion challenge with every breath, "I am a man!"

It was as unnecessary for him to breathe a syllable or strike an attitude to drive that declaration home as it would be for a dreadnought to fire a broadside in announcement of the purpose for which it had been launched.

The stranger's square-blocked face was smooth-shaven and his clothes, in their careless roughness, seemed less garments than an emphasis for the power and swiftness of the muscles beneath them. She thought of them less as clothes than as plumage — an eagle's plumage.

Instead of brogans tan boots were laced half way to the knee and above them the trousers bulged squarely like the feathers that break off close above an eagle's talons. His throat and hands were of the clear smoothness and clean hardness of bronze.

Yet brow and lips and nostrils seemed rather chiseled than molded, with the little edges and angles left, so

that the contour suggested granite while the texture seemed metal.

Dominating all the rest, the eyes, cool, but sentient with latent passion and power, lighted from within rather than from without, were always the first and last things that one saw.

Suddenly she wondered if in him she might not find an ally. She felt very lonely. To have counsel with some one in these hills less stupidly phlegmatic than Good Anse Talbott would bring comfort and reassurance to her heart. She must cope with the powerful chicane and resourcefulness of Bad Anse Havey, him of the untamed ferocity and cold cruelty and subtle intelligence. If some native son could share even a little of her view-point she would find in him a tower of strength.

She would have liked to tell him how her loneliness called out for comprehension and friendship, yet she did not know how to start. Then while she stood there still hesitant, still very beautiful and slim and wraith-like under the moon, he spoke in his reassuring steadiness of voice.

Perhaps he had yielded to the unspoken appeal of the deep rangeful eyes that were always blue, yet never twice the same blue, and the sweetly sensitive lips so tantalizingly charming, because they were fashioned for smiles and were now drooping instead. Perhaps the wild masculine in him responded to the pliant curves that spoke of strength and stamina in a figure so lithely slender.

"I reckon," he said, "you find it right diff'rent from down below, don't you?"

She nodded. "But it's very beautiful," she added as she swept her hand about in a gesture of admiration.

It was he who nodded at that, very gravely, and almost reverently, though at the next moment his laugh was short and almost ironical.

"I reckon God never fashioned anything better — nor worse," he told her. "When you've breathed it an' seen it an' lived it, no other place is fit to dwell in, an' yet sometimes I 'low that God didn't mean it to be the habitation of men an' women. It's cut out for eagles an' hawks an' wild things. It belongs to the winds an' storms. It puts fire into veins meant for blood, an' the only crop it raises much is hell."

"You — you've been out in the other world — down below?" she questioned.

"Yes, but I couldn't stay down there. I couldn't breathe hardly. I sultered an' sickened — an' I came back."

She turned to him impulsively.

"I don't know who you are," she began hurriedly, "but I know that you brought this man home when he was not in a condition to come alone. I know that you sent a man ahead of you to keep peace at the dance. I know you have a heart, and it means something, — means a great deal — to feel that some one in these hills feels about it as I feel."

She broke off abruptly, realizing that she was allowing too much appeal to creep into her voice; that she had come to fight, not to sue for favor. He was standing, making no offer to interrupt or answer until he was quite sure she was through, but his attitude was that of dignified, almost deferential attention.

"I — I thought maybe you would help me," she finished a little falteringly. "Would you mind telling me your name?"

He had unhitched his horse and stood with the reins hanging from one hand.

"It's Havey," he said slowly, "but hereabouts I've got another name that's better known." He paused, then added with a hardened timber of voice as though bent on making defiant what would otherwise sound like confession: "It's Bad Anse."

The girl recoiled as though under a physical shock. It seemed to her that every way she turned she was to meet staggering disappointments. She had spoken almost pleadingly to the man with whom she could make no terms; the man whose arrogant power and lawless influence she must break and paralyze before her own régime could find standing room in these hills.

Yet as she looked at him standing there, and stiffened resolutely, she could say nothing except, "Oh!"

Into the monosyllable crept many things: repulsion, defiance and chagrin for her mistake, and in recognition of them all the bronzed features of the man hardened a little and into the cool eyes snapped a sparkle of the sleeping fires she had divined.

"I made my suggestion to the wrong man," she said steadily. "I misunderstood you. I thought you said you wanted peace."

He swung himself to the saddle, then as he gathered up his reins he turned and in his utterance was immovable steadiness and glacial coldness, together with a ring of contempt and restrained anger.

"I did say that and by God Almighty, I meant just

what I said. I *do* want peace in these mountains — but I ain't never found no way yet ter get peace without fightin' for it."

She saw him ride away into the moonlight, with his shoulders very straight and the battered felt hat very high, and he looked neither to right nor left as he went until the mists had swallowed him.

CHAPTER V

FOR the rest of her life Juanita looked back upon the remainder of that night as upon some lurid delirium shot across with many hideous apparitions.

For a long while she sat there on the stile gazing across the steep banks between which the waters of Tribulation slipped along in a tide of tarnished quicksilver, and beyond which rose the near ridges of blue and the far dim ridges of gray. At her back she knew that the family and the missionary were sitting in talk. Their nasal, high-pitched voices drifted vaguely to her and jarred upon her nerves. Jeb, the oldest boy, had left after supper to go back to the dance — for in these lonely back waters of the world any sort of entertainment is too rare to be wasted. Down by the water the frogs whose voices had a little while ago seemed mellow were croaking dismally now, and when some soft-winged and noiseless creature fluttered by near her face and from the sycamore overhead quavered the long wistful call of a "grave-yard owl" she shivered a little. Even the message of the whippoorwill was changed. Instead of "Whippoorwill" the birds seemed to voice in dirge-like monotony, "These poor hills! These poor hills!"

She sat there with her hands clasped about her updrawn knees as she used to sit when some childhood grief had weighed upon her. The moonlight caught

and sparkled on wet lashes and something suspiciously like tears in her eyes, but there was no one to see except the downy owl that blinked back from the bone-white branch of the gnarled sycamore.

She could not shake out of her mind the humiliation of having shown her weakest side to Bad Anse Havey. It was some satisfaction to remember the offended stiffening of his shoulders and the dark fire in his eyes. She had heard much of the easily hurt pride of these mountain men; a pride which made them walk in strange surroundings with upright heads and eyes challenging criticism of their uncouthness, their wildness. She had first appealed to this man, but at least she had also stung him with her scorn. Now they would be open enemies.

And with thought of him, the whole situation grew strangely complex. She could no longer think of him as she had before thought of him, nor of his people as she had before thought of them.

She knew that this young man in a country where every man was poor and no man a pauper, owned great tracts of land that yielded only sparse crops, with the most arduous coaxing. She knew that under his rocky acres slept a great wealth of coal and that above them grew noble and virgin forests of hard wood. The coming of railroads and development would make him a rich man. Yet he stood there, seemingly prizing above all those magnificent certainties the empty boast of feudal chieftainship. He stood like an eagle on a tree-top, jealously guarding the wild fastnesses of the crags around him. Why? She asked herself and found no answer. At all events he was a man. With that

thought came an unwelcome comparison and a catch in her throat. The moon was full and when last it had been full it had shone on a leave-taking between trimmed hedges.

She drew herself up straight as she sat on the stile and impatiently dashed away the moisture from her eyes. If that other man had only had in him the iron wasted on this desperado, Anse Havey!

The gods blend badly the elements in life's crucible, she pondered. A mongrel dog strolled over to the stile and sniffed at her ankles. She had heard Mrs. McNash call the brute's name, and now she put out a friendly hand and laid it on the upstretched muzzle. "It's a pretty funny old world, Beardog, isn't it?" she sighed and the mongrel wagged its stump tail in ready affirmation. Then she rose and went unwillingly back to the cabin.

She did not know that in drawing off to herself and denying her isolated entertainers the novelty of her society she had been guilty of a grave discourtesy. And they did not intimate to her that their pride was wounded for in the Cumberlands a law which is above other laws guarantees to the guest under one's roof-tree all that the meager possibilities afford, and returns even for slighting appreciation a homely dignity of welcome.

From the lean-to kitchen Mrs. McNash had brought a pan of live coals and the cavernous recesses of the smoke-blackened chimney roared with a great fire. The air had taken on the night chill of the high places although it was June, and now in the illumination from the hearth Juanita saw for the first time the ugly picture of the single room.

The floor was grimy and in each corner stood a huge four-post bed so that only about the hearth was a circumscribed space for the crowded chairs. Close to the door leaned an ancient spinning wheel and everywhere was the dust and soot of an unlighted place where a gust of downward wind drives the smoke inward. One note only was modern. Propped against the wall near the head of one bed, evidently that of Fletch and his wife, was a rifle, ready to hand, and as the fire burned high and the corners of the room came into sight, the light played and flickered on its barrel and stock and caught the blue metal of a heavy revolver which hung in belt and holster from the bed-post.

The host sat barefooted before the blaze and talked with the missionary. The girl heard their conversation through the dullness of fatigue, wondering how she was to sleep in this pigsty, yet restrained from asking permission to retire only by her embarrassment and unfamiliarity with the native code.

"I'm plumb pleased ter know ye, Brother Talbott," Fletch McNash, now apparently recovered from his day's carousal, was gravely assuring the missionary. "I've heerd tell about ye fer years. Hit seems qu'ar I hain't never met up with ye afore now. Folks says, that afore ye repented an' foun' grace they used ter call ye Hell-cat Talbott, an' thet in the old Talbott-Hawkins war ye war a mighty vi'lent man."

The missionary sighed. "Thet war afore the speret *des*cended on me. Nowadays folks calls me 'Good Anse.' I hopes I be."

At last Juanita heard Brother Talbott suggest, "Hit's gittin' on ter be late an' we've got a tol'able long

way ter journey ter-morrer. I reckon we'd better lay down."

Juanita began nervously counting heads. There were eight in the room and the boy Jeb yet to return from the dance, and while she was still trying to work out the problem the woman pointed to a corner bed and suggested, "I reckon you'd better bundle in with Dawn."

She saw the girl crawl into the four-poster just as she was and the missionary kick off his brogans and shed his coat, so taking off her own boots and jacket she slipped between the faded "coverlets" of the sheetless bed and tried to banish hateful comparisons.

In five minutes the taper was out and the place was silent save for the crackle and sputter of the logs. The little girl at her side lay quiet and her regular breathing proclaimed her already asleep. In another five minutes Juanita with closed eyes and burning lids, and aching muscles, heard the nasal chorus of snoring sleepers. She alone was awake in the house.

She opened her eyes and gazed up at the discolored rafters. She watched the light sparkle and flash on barrel of rifle and lock of pistol. The heat of the place became a swelter; the mingled odors of charred wood, tobacco smoke and the fumes of liquor nauseated her.

Her mind went back to the view across the lawns of the Country Club at home. She saw the ivied walls of the college where she had been educated — for this. Then she saw in memory the delicately dancing string of polo ponies going over to the grounds for the afternoon game; saw herself sitting with other daintily gowned women on the white flagstoned terrace of the club-house. Outside the door "Beardog," the mongrel, whined

vainly for admittance and she grew homesick for even a glimpse of her great Dane.

And as she thought of these things the soul in her grew small and weak and very sick, and the heart in her told her that it stood on the verge of breaking.

CHAPTER VI

IT is related in the history of the Hatfield-McCoy feud, which burst out between neighbors over a stray pig, and claimed its toll of lives through a half century, that one of the Hatfield girls wrote on a white pillar at the front of her often bereaved house, "There is no place like home." The sequel tells that a cynical traveler passing that way, reflected on the annals of that house and added in postscript, "Leastways not this side of hell."

The story of the Hatfield-McCoy feud is in many ways that of other "wars" which have made of the roof-tree of the eastern divide a land beleaguered and unique.

To the crags and coves where he was born the mountain man adheres, and if by chance he is led to wander, even if he leaves his country for his country's good, the call of the highlands will inevitably draw him back to face the shot from the laurel and the vengeance of the enemy who has "bided his time."

Two hundred years ago a handful of Anglo-Saxons were stranded there where nature's defiance proved strong enough to halt their westward march.

It was not granted them, as it was their more favored brethren to colonize the rich land of promise beyond and upon them settled the bitter heritage of the derelict. Their great-grandchildren remain to-day pio-

neers in bondage to the hills. They sing the songs once sung along the wild Scottish border and jealously hold to outgrown ideals. They fight to the death and turn away no shelterless stranger and forgive no enemy.

From such blood came Lincoln and from it will come other Lincolns.

To these men the ordered civilization of "Down below" means a foreign power which autocratically crushes. It means Courts whose processes become a power in the hands of feudal enemies, used to smite and persecute.

In the war between the Haveys and the McBriars there was more than the forgotten episode of a stray razor-back, which was not surrendered to its lawful owners. They had for decades hated and killed each other with a fidelity of bitterness that made all their truces and intermarriages fail of permanent peace.

Between the territories where they had originally settled, stretched a barrier of hills broken by only one passable gap. The McBriars had made their first habitations east of that ridge and gap where the waters run toward the sea. The Haveys had set up their power to the west where the springs feed the rivers that go down to the Bluegrass and to Tennessee. Had the two clans been content to remain respectively on the sunrise and sunset slopes of the backbone, they might never have clashed, but there were bright-eyed women to the west and east. Feminine Havey eyes lured McBriar suitors and McBriar girls seemed to the Havey men worth any dare that Fate might set for their venturing. So it has been since young Montagus and Capulets ignored dead lines — and long before. Smoke

went up from cabins on both sides that housed men and women of both clans. Hatred scattered and set up new points of infection all along Tribulation and beyond its headwaters.

The war of the States had rent them farther apart when McBriars fought for and Haveys against the Union. Since then each clan had wielded strong political power, and wielded it against each other, but far below flag and party went down the tap root of poisonous and personal hatred.

It was an unfortunate thing that Cal Douglas should, on a February afternoon, have shot to death his brother-in-law, Noah McKay, even if as Cal earnestly assured the Jury "he was jest obleeged an' beholden ter do hit." All the circumstances of the affair were inopportune for his kinsmen and the kinsmen of the man who died with a bullet through his vitals.

Cal bore a name for surly character and even in a land where grudge-bearing is a religion, he was deemed ultra fanatical in fanning the flame of hatred. Noah McKay, himself, was little loved by either the Haveys, into whose family he had married, or the McBriars from whom he sprang. Neighbors told of frequent and violent bickerings between the man and his shrewish wife who was the twin sister of Cal Douglas.

"Cal Douglas an' Noey McKay's woman air es much alike es two peas in a pod," went neighborhood pronouncement. "They air both soured on mankind an' they glories in human misery."

Had the fight on that winter evening ended in the death of both participants, McBriars and Haveys would alike have called it a gentle riddance and dropped the

matter where it stood. But since a Havey had slain a McBriar, and the Havey still lived it could not, in honor, be so dropped. It left an uneven score.

So the McBriars called that killing a murder while the Haveys styled it self-defense, and a new peg was driven upon which to hang clan bitterness.

Since the mountaineer has little to do in the winter and spring save gossip, the affair grew in importance with rehearsing and to each telling was added new features. It was assumed east of the ridge that Noah had incurred the displeasure of Bad Anse Havey by the suspicion of tale-bearing to old Milt McBriar. It was argued that that particular wife-beating might have passed as uneventfully as several similar episodes heretofore, had not the heads of the Haveys made it a pretext for eliminating a McBriar who dwelt in their midst and carried news across the ridge to his own people.

For several years the feud had slept, not the complete sleep of death, but the fitful, simmering sleep of precarious animosity. Slowly the bitterness had become a fevered sore, so tense and strained that it needed only a spark to fire it into actual war. But neither clan felt so overwhelmingly strong as to court an issue just yet and realizing the desperate quality of any outbreak, both Milt McBriar " over yon " and Anse Havey over here had guarded the more belligerent kinsmen with jealous eye. They had until now held them checked and leashed, though growling.

For these reasons the trial had been awaited with a sense of crisis in the town of Peril where it might mean a pitched battle. So it had been awaited, too, up and down the creeks and branches that crept from the

ragged hills, where men were leading morbid lives of isolation and nursing grudges.

Yet nothing had happened, and though the streets were empty of peaceful folk and doors were barred, when the bell in the rickety cupola called men to attend "High-Court," the case had proceeded with a surprising apathy.

During the three days that the suspense of the trial continued, each recess of Court found the long-limbed frame of Milt McBriar tilted back in a split-bottomed chair on the flagstones at the front of the hotel. His dark face and piercing eyes gazed always thoughtfully, and very calmly off across the dusty town to the reposeful languor of the piled-up, purple skyline. Likewise each recess found seated at the other end of the same house-front the shorter, heavier figure of a fair-haired man with ruddy face and sandy mustache. Never did he appear there without two companions, who like his Lartius and Herminius remained at his right and left. Never did the dark giant speak to the florid man, yet never did either fail to keep a glance directed toward the other.

The man of the sandy hair was Breck Havey, next to Bad Anse, the most influential leader of the clan. His influence here in Peril made or unmade the officers of the law.

When these two men came together, as opposing witnesses in a homicide case, the air was fraught with elements of storm. "Thar's war a-brewin'," commented a native, glancing at the quietly seated figures one noon, "an' them fellers air in ther b'ilin'."

CHAPTER VII

PHYSICAL exhaustion will finally tell, even over such handicaps as a mountain feather-bed and the fumes of a backwoods cabin.

If Juanita Holland did not at last actually fall asleep she drifted into a sort of coma and uneasily dreamed that she was watching a polo game at Bryn Mawr. The man whom she had sent away was dashing, with lifted mallet, after the willow ball and she was bending forward with parted lips.

Behind the white goal posts was a ragged mountain thick with tangles of laurel and rhododendron, for such is the chaotic topography of dreams. Just at the moment when the man, whom she had sent away, raised his mallet for the stroke which should score a goal, she saw Bad Anse Havey step from the thicket and throw to his shoulder a rifle which barked before she could scream a warning. The other man fell from his pony with a red smear on his silk shirt and as he fell he said calmly, but bitterly, to her across the field, while their eyes met, "This is your doing, Juanita."

She wondered if she had really screamed aloud as her eyes opened and stared at the rafters, but little Dawn's sleeping breath rose and fell undisturbed at her side, and the snores about her went on unbroken. She raised her hand and wiped the perspiration from her eyes. She even ventured to look cautiously about.

After all she must have slept heavily for now besides the four beds there was a pallet on the floor and at its top the fire-light, which was lower now, but still strong, showed a towsled head, and at its bottom two bare feet. Jeb had come home from the dance.

Again she shut her eyes, but their lids were hot and feverish. The whole procession of the day's wretched occurrences paraded before her and she wondered if these creatures were worth the effort she was making in their behalf. Here they slept about her the sodden sleep of beasts, herded together in dirty congestion. How, into such a life, could she hope to introduce clean ideals or ambitions?

From present disgust and discouragement the trend of her reflections swept forward into premonitions and sorry prophecies for the future. If to-night was bad what might to-morrow be?

The messenger who had talked low out there in the dark, when the tall stranger had still been to her only a soothing voice, was a native. He looked as if he had been trained to face even the uncertainties of such a life as this. And yet his utterance, too, had been shrill with excitement. "Thar's liable ter be hell ter-night!" What might even now be happening over there, where Milt McBriar designed to give the Haveys "somethin' ter celebrate proper"?

What monstrous things might she have to face at the very inception of her mission? Could it be that the sleeping volcano of violence would select her coming as a cue for eruption, and that she, who had seen only the better things of life until to-day, must begin her work by looking on at such a revolting drama?

She had come here only to try to aid and assist, and in welcome the very crags and everything within their sandstone gates were showing her a snarl of bared fangs and evil, burning eyes.

For a seeming of centuries she lay there aching in heart and mind and body. She kept her eyes tight shut and tried to count sheep jumping over a fence. She tried to think of pleasant, inconsequential things and of dances and house parties where she had had a good time.

And finally she fell again into that half sleep which dreams of wakefulness. It may have lasted minutes or hours, but suddenly she roused again with a start from a new nightmare and lay trembling under the oppression of a poignant foreboding. What was it that she had subconsciously heard or imagined? She was painfully wide awake in the slumbering cabin. At last she was sure of a sound, low, but instinct with warning.

Beardog was growling just outside the door.

Then violently and without the preface of gradual approach — precisely as though horsemen had sprung from the earth — there clattered and beat past the front of the cabin a staccato thunder of wildly galloping hoofs and a rattle of scattered rocks. She felt an uncanny freezing of her marrow. Horses travel perilous and broken roads in that fashion only when their riders are in wild haste.

As abruptly as the drum-beat had come it died again into silence and there was no diminuendo of hoof-beats receding into the distance. The thing was weird and ghostly. She had not noticed in the weariness of arrival at the cabin that the road ran deep in sand to the

corner of the fence and that after fifty yards of rough and broken rock it fell away again into another sound-muffling stretch. She knew only that she was thoroughly frightened and that whatever the noise was, it bore with it the proclaiming of hot and desperate haste.

Yet even in her terror she had moved only to turn her head, and had opened her eyes cautiously and narrowly.

There was no sound in the cabin now; not even the stertorous breath of a snore. The fire flickered faintly and occasionally sent up from its white bed of ashes a dying spurt, before which the darkness fell back a little, for the moment. She could see that Fletch McNash had half risen in his bed. His head was partly turned in an attitude of intent listening and his pose was as rigid as that of a bird dog frozen on a point. It had all been momentary and as Juanita gazed, she saw other figures stir uneasily, though no one spoke. The boy on the floor had not moved. The missionary lay still, but the woman's figure stirred uneasily beneath the heaped-up quilt.

So for a few moments the strange and tense tableau held, and the girl, watching the house-holder's alert and motionless pose, remembered him as he had hunched drunkenly over his plate a few hours ago. The two pictures were hard to reconcile.

Then at some warning which her less acute ears failed to register, she saw Fletch McNash's right hand sweep outward toward the wall and come up gripping the rifle.

Still there was no word, though the eldest boy's head had risen from the pallet.

Keyed now to concert pitch, the girl held her body

rigid and through half-closed lids, looked across the dim room. While she was so staring, and pretending to sleep there drifted from a long way off an insistent, animal-like yell with a peculiar quaver in its final note. She did not know that it was the famous McBriar rallying cry, and that trouble inevitably followed fast in the wake of its sounding. She knew only that it fitted in with her childhood's terrified conception of the Indian's war-whoop. But she did know that in an instant after it had been borne along the wind she had seen a thing happen which she would have disbelieved had she heard it from the lips of a narrator; a thing unrealizable in its swift silence; a thing belonging to the stern legerdemain of self-defense.

She saw, in one breathing space, the half-risen figure of Fletch McNash under the covers of his bed; and that of young Jeb under the quilts of his pallet. She saw in the next breathing space, with no realization of how it had happened, both of them crouched low at the center of the floor; the father's eyes glued to the front door, the son's to the back. And as they crouched there in the fitful firelight, their long shadows wavered off from them — rising and falling in inky patches. The elder man bent low like a runner on his mark waiting the starting signal. His right hand held the rifle at his front, his left lightly touched the floor with fingers spread to brace his posture, and his face was tensely upturned. So while she counted ten father and son crouched in precisely similar poses, one covering the barred door at the front with a repeating rifle, the other seeming to stare through the massive timbers of that at the back with leveled pistol. No one spoke. No

one moved, but the regular swelling breath of sleep had died for every pair of lips in the place was holding its breath bated. Then came a fresh pounding of hooves and scattering of gravel, and a chorus of angry incoherent voices sounded above the noise of flight — or was it pursuit? Whatever words were being shouted out there in the night were swallowed in the medley, except a wake of oaths that seemed to float behind.

The noise, like the other which had preceded it, died swiftly, but in the instant that it lasted Fletch McNash lifted his left hand and brought his rifle to the "ready" and his son had instinctively thrust forward his cocked revolver.

For a full minute, perhaps, the girl in the bed had the picture of two figures bent low like bronze emblems of motionless preparedness, yet not a syllable had been spoken and when from quite a distance beyond there came the snap of a single shot, followed by the retort of a volley, they still neither spoke nor moved. But at last as if by one impulse they rose and turned to face each other.

Then and then only was there utterance of any sort inside the house. In a voice, so low that Juanita would not have heard it had not every sense been acutely and painfully alert, Fletch spoke to his son, "I reckon ther war's on ag'in."

The boy nodded sullenly and the father commanded in an almost inaudible undertone,

"Lay down."

The boy went back to his pallet and the father to his bed. For a long time there was dead silence and then one by one they took up again their chorus of

snores. To-morrow might bring chaos, but to-night offered sleep. Still the girl lay gazing helplessly up at the rafters and wondering what things had transpired out there between the grim uncommunicative silences of the slopes.

A little while ago she had been dreading what *might* come. Now in an access of terror she thought of what *must* come. "Ther war's on"; that was enough. Evidently there had been "hell" over there at the dance. She had reached the country just in time to see a new and sanguinary chapter open. Her view of the life had so far consisted only of thumb-nail sketches, but they had been terrible little keyhole pictures, and she trembled as she lay there contemplating what was before her when the door should be fully opened.

She would in all probability see people she actually knew, with whom she had spoken and whose hands she had taken, the victims of this brutal blood-lust. She would have to live day in and day out with murderers and accustom herself to their atrocities. Every delicate fiber in her nature throbbed with repulsion and panic.

The horror of the whole system danced a grisly rigadoon of death across her throbbing eyeballs.

Through her head ran hideously lines of verse:

> ". . . But never came the day;
> And crooked shapes of terror crouched,
> In the corners where we lay:
> And each evil sprite that walks by night
> Before us seemed to play."

And in the face of such things these human beasts could sleep!

But one was not sleeping, and after a while among

the snoring slumberers Good Anse Talbott rose and fell upon his knees before the hearth. There were still a few glowing embers there and as he bent and at last took the knotted hands away from his seamed face, a feeble light fell upon his features and upon the bare feet that twisted convulsively as he prayed.

It was a tortured face, and as the girl watched him she realized for the first time the significance of the words "to wrestle in prayer." It suddenly came to her that she had never before seen a man really pray, and for an hour the backwoods missionary knelt there pleading with his God for his unrepentant people.

Often his voice was only a groaning murmur out of which came no coherence, unless as it might be, that God could understand. But now and then she caught words and her own hands lying on the quilt folded themselves reverently.

". . . Oh, Lord I hev sought ter carry Thy gawspel ter these folk, but I reckon I hain't hardly no worthy vessel . . . my own hands hev been red with blood, but, Lord, I've done sought ter wash 'em clean an' dedicate them ter Thy sarvice . . . Lord Gawd, look down an' command me. . . . Show me . . . ther way ter teach 'em an' ter lead 'em up outen these shadders. . . . Lord Gawd, show me ther way!"

Outside a single whippoorwill wailed plaintively: "These poor hills! These poor hills!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN the lowlands morning announces itself with the rosy glow of dawn and upflung shafts of light, but here in the hills of Appalachia even the sun comes stealing with surreptitious caution and veiled face as if fearful of ambuscade.

When Juanita opened her eyes, to find the tumbled beds empty save for herself, she thought with a dismal heart that a day of rain and sodden skies lay ahead of her.

The dim room reeked with wet mists and an inquisitive young rooster stalked jauntily over the puncheon floor, where his footfalls sounded in tiny clicks. It was a few minutes after five o'clock and Juanita shivered a little with the clammy chill as she went over to the door and looked out.

The mountains were vague apparitions, though the sun should have risen an hour ago. The whole landscape was a dreary monotone, shrouded in wet streamers of mist that cut off the view and left only a gray void as if the world had dissolved over night.

Among piled up bowlders where the thicket came down to the yard's edge stood a single tulip poplar. Its gnarled roots broke from the earth in smooth-worn elbows, and between them gushed the clear tongue of a mountain spring, breaking from underground and spilling into a basin of rock.

Bending over it in the unconscious grace of perfect naturalness, with her sleeves rolled back and her dark hair tumbling, knelt the girl, Dawn.

Juanita crossed the yard and as she came near, the younger girl raised a face still glistening with the cold water into which it had been plunged and glowing with shyness.

The older woman nodded with a smile as she, too, knelt to thrust her face into the sparkle of the natural fountain. "Good-morning," she said. "I think you and I are going to be great friends. I know we are if you will try to like me as much as I do you."

The wild, Dryad-like little creature stood with the bare toes of one foot twisting in the wet earth and the fingers of both hands nervously clutching at the calico of her skirt. She was gazing with artless worship on the fuller beauty of the "furrin" visitor who was, save for the swelling of more womanly curves, as slender as herself.

"What makes ye like me?" she suddenly demanded in a half-challenging voice, while her eyes held the direct questioning of one who will establish no friendship on a basis of denied frankness.

"*You* make me like you," laughed Juanita, as she raised a dripping countenance.

The mountain girl held her eyes still in the unwavering steadiness of her race, then she said in a voice that carried an undernote of defiance.

"Ye hain't nuver seed me afore an'—" she broke off, then added doggedly—"an' besides I don't know nuthin'."

"I mean to see you often, after this," announced the woman from Down-below, "and the things you don't know can all be learned."

A swift eagerness flashed into the younger face and a sudden torrent of questioning seemed to hover on her lips, but it did not find utterance. She only turned and led the way silently back toward the house. When they were almost at the door Dawn hesitated and Juanita encouraged her with a smile. It was clear that the mountain girl found whatever she meant to say difficult for she stood indecisive and her cheeks were hotly suffused with color, so that at last Juanita prompted, "What is it, dear?"

"Ye said—" began Dawn hastily and awkwardly, "ye said suthin' 'bout me a-tryin' ter like ye. I—I don't hafter try—I *does* hit." Then having made a confession as difficult to her shy taciturnity as a callow boy's first declaration of love, she fled abruptly around the corner of the house.

Juanita stood looking after her with a puzzled brow. This hard mountain reserve which is so strong that friends rarely shake hands; that fathers seldom embrace their children, and that the kiss is known only to courtship, was new to her: and strange.

At breakfast she did not see Dawn.

Last night, until heaviness overtook him, Fletch McNash had been voluble and full of loud jest. This morning his face with its high cheekbones and bushy beard, was unreadable and mute. No allusion was made to the happenings of last night.

But the girl noticed that inside the door leaned the

house-holder's "rifle-gun" and under Young Jeb's left arm-pit bulged the partly masked shape of a pistol butt.

Young Jeb's face yesterday had been that of a boy, this morning it was the sullen face of a man confronting grim realities. Had Juanita been more familiar with the contemporary affairs of the community she might have known that many visages along Tribulation that morning brooded with the same scowl from the same cause. The McBriar yell had been raised last night in the heart of the Havey country, and this morning brought the shame of a land invaded and dishonored.

Dawn did not reappear until Juanita had mounted and turned her mule's head forward. Then as she was passing the dilapidated barn the slim calico-clad figure slipped from its door and intercepted her in the road, holding up a handful of queer-shaped roots.

"I 'lowed ye mout need these hyar," she whispered still diffidently.

Juanita smiled as she bent in her saddle to take the gift.

"Thank you, dear. What are they?"

"Hit's ginsang," Dawn assured her. "Hit grows back thar in ther woods an' hits got a powerful heap of virtue. Hit frisks ther speret an' drives away torment. Ef ye starts ter swoon argin, jest chaw hit."

Juanita repressed her amusement.

"You see, dear," she declared. "There's one very wonderful thing you know, that I didn't know. And don't forget when we meet again we are old friends."

Then, looking back over her shoulder as she rode

on, Juanita saw the figures of both Fletch and Jeb cross the fence at the far side of the yard, and turn into the mountain thicket. Each carried a rifle cradled in his bent elbow.

. . . . . .

When just before sunset yesterday afternoon a verdict of acquittal for Cal Douglas had come from the jury room, the town of Peril had once more held its breath and doors had closed and the streets had cleared of such as wished to remain non-combatants. But with no comment or criticism, Milt McBriar mounted his horse and rode out of town, shaping his course over the hills toward his own house. Following his example with equal quiet, his kinsmen mounted, too, and disappeared.

As for Cal Douglas, he reserved any enthusiasm his vindication may have brought to his heart until he was back again in the depths of the hills. He and his kinsmen turned their horses by a shorter and steeper trail to the house where the dance was going forward with shuffling and fiddling and passing of the jug.

When Milt McBriar and his fellows started home an informer or two from the Havey ranks kept them in view, themselves unseen, until they passed through the gap and started down the other side of the ridge into their own domain.

That they were being so watched was either known to the McBriars or assumed by them. But a picked squad on fresh mounts was waiting over there in a place where the road ran deep through forest and laurel, and this squad was equipped with repeating rifles. Milt McBriar himself did not go back with them. He had

made all his arrangements in advance, and it was not seemly that the chief himself should take a personal part in an execution which he had decreed.

"Let me hear the news, boys," he had said with a wave of his hand, and then he had ridden on, still reflective and calm of mien toward his own house from which the smoke rose in the distance.

The house where the dance was being held stood bebetween the knees of two hills and before the pocket in which it had been built ran the road, following the twistings of Tribulation. It was a larger house than most, hereabouts, and had in the same enclosure another building which had beforetimes been a wayside store. It was in this store that the floor had been cleared for dancing. It was there that the fiddles sang and the broganed feet shuffled to the ancient hoe-down and jig of the hills, which have never known a round dance.

In the three rooms of the house proper and about its tight-trodden yard stood such as had wearied of dancing, and here the jug was passed.

Near midnight a half-dozen men, who had not been invited, rode carefully over an almost obliterated trail which wound blindly through the hills at the back of the place and hitched their horses in a rock-surrounded hollow a half mile from the house. Other horses and mules were hitched all along the county road, but these belonged to the legitimate guests.

As the half-dozen men whose arrival had been so cautiously accomplished began slipping down, each holding his own course in the cover of the laurel, there was nothing to indicate that any warning had gone

ahead of them. The shadows fell deep and impenetrable in patches of cobalt. The ridges stood up boldly against a sky in which innummerable stars and the band of the Milky Way were pallid ghosts of light undone by the moon's magnificence.

From the houses with their yellow windows and their open doors came no note of apprehension — no intimation of suspicion. A medley of voices, a din of scraping feet and the whine and boom of fiddles gave out a careless chorus to the night.

Slowly with an adept craft that hardly broke a twig underfoot, three of the new arrivals hitched their way forward to a point of vantage down near the road.

They went crouched low, holding to the shadows with rifles thrust out ahead, and faces almost smiling in their grim foretaste of sure success. In a few moments they would have before them the doors and windows as lighted targets. Then whoever saw Cal Douglas in his front would crook forefinger on trigger and the error of the Jury would be rectified. The others would send a volley at random for good measure.

It was almost too easy. It seemed a shame to snatch a full and red revenge with such scant effort. To be sure a moment later there would be a wrathful flood of men rushing out of the pandemonium to rake and search the hillsides, but there would first come the panic-ridden instant of utter surprise — and that would be enough.

Then as the foremost figure, crouching in easy range of a window, braced himself on one knee and peered forward under his upturned hat brim, there came the reports of several rifles — but they were not the rifles of the McBriar squad, and they came not from the hills

in front, but from the laurel at the back. They broke from directly between the carefully picked squad and its horses.

The man who had braced his knee and cocked his rifle gave a brief gurgling sound as an oath was stifled off in a hemorrhage of the throat, and pitched forward on his face. After that the figure lay without stirring, its own blood blackening the rifle whose trigger guard pressed against its forehead.

The doors vomited men. There was a trailing and ragged outburst of firearms and many dark figures plunged here and there across the silvered spaces where the shadows did not fall.

CHAPTER IX

THE scheme that had germinated back of the contemplative and seemingly resigned eyes of Milt McBriar had borne its fruit of surprise and death — but so far as the tally showed the surprise and death had recoiled entirely upon the would-be avengers.

Of the six men who had crept down three had lain within one hundred yards of the house when the shots came from their rear. The other three were off to the side ready to bring up the horses as close as might prove safe when the moment came for flight. But now they, too, found themselves cut off. Had the man who fired on the man who was about to fire, waited an instant longer there would have been more deaths than one. His colleagues would then have been, like himself, covering their respective victims, victims who confidently thought themselves executioners. But as it was they had not quite yet worked themselves into positions untrammeled by intervening rock and timber. The man who fired first, knew that for he had not heard the perfectly imitated quaver of " scritch-owls " which was to signify a common readiness. But as he eyed his crouching victim across his rifle sights he had also been able to look beyond him, and had seen the figure of Cal Douglas pause at the lighted window. He knew that to wait a moment would be to wait too long. So the others had to fire blindly through black undergrowth

at speeding shadows — and they missed. The fleeing murder squad melted back into the black timber and some of them, signaling with the call of frog and owl, came together in temporary safety. They dared not go to their own horses, since they might be discovered in the effort. The road that led into McBriar country would be watched. If they were to carry away unpunctured skins they must flee the other way — into the Havey territory and astride stolen Havey horses. It was every man for himself, and they had not paused to count noses. They hurriedly swung themselves into saddles at the remote end of the line of hitched mounts and galloped pell-mell down the road toward the cabin of Fletch McNash.

When the theft of the horses was discovered, Anse Havey sent pursuing parties to ride the roads in both directions.

It had seemed to Havey wiser to withhold his warning from all save those whom he needed to use. To all the rest the affair had come without warning, and the hue and cry which followed the rifle shots was genuine in its excitement.

But in a very few minutes the pandemonium fell away to quiet, and sullenness supplanted the shouting. The mountains behind, where several men were stealthily seeking escape and many others were stalking them, lay silent in the moonlight. Here and there an owl quavered and a frog boomed, and some were not owls and frogs, but men, calling as lost quail call at twilight when the covey has been scattered under fire.

A hundred yards beyond the window a small and inquisitive knot of men gathered around a figure that had

hunched forward, sprawling on a cocked rifle. Some one turned the figure up and straightened its limbs so that they should not stiffen in such grotesquerie of attitude. The face with the yellow lantern light shining down on it was the face of a boy of twenty. Its thin lips were set in a grim smile of satisfaction, for Death had overtaken him without a suspicion of its coming.

Perhaps had a photograph of his retina been taken it would have disclosed the portrait of Cal Douglas pausing at the open window.

"Hit's Little Nash McKay," exclaimed a surprised voice, using the diminutive which in the mountains takes the place of Junior and stays with a man well on in life. The victim who had been designated to avenge the death of Noah McKay had been Noah McKay's younger brother.

Meanwhile the pursuing horsemen were gaining slowly on those that fled. The murder squad had failed and must bear back to Milt McBriar, if they ever got back, a narrative of frustrated effort. They were bitterly angry and proportionately desperate. So as they clattered along the empty road, meeting no enemy whom they could shoot down in appeasement of their wrath and chagrin, they satisfied themselves with raising their war cry for the benefit of the sleeping cabins.

A little distance beyond Fletch McNash's place lay a cross-trail by which they might find a circuitous way back over the ridge, but it was too steep and broken to ride. They could make better time on foot over the "roughs," so there they abandoned their mounts, and plunged into the timber. When the pursuers came up with the discarded horses they realized that further

effort "in the night-time" would be bootless. Yet since the heaving flanks and panting nostrils of the horses testified that they had been only a few minutes late, they took a last chance and plunged into the thicket.

There a single defiant shot, sent from a long way up the slope, was their only challenge, and their volley of reply, fired at the flash, was merely a retort of hatred. But even in the isolation of the hills certain news travels on wings, and the morning would find every cabin dweller wearing a face of grim and sullen realization. The phrase which Fletch McNash had whispered to his boy would travel to the headwaters of every fork, and the faces of the women would once more wear the drawn misery of anxiety for their men.

. . . . . .

It was into this newly charged atmosphere that Juanita Holland and her missionary guide rode in the morning mists. The face of the preacher still bore something of last night's torture and despair, for his eyes were looking ahead and foresaw the undoing, in a few fierce moments of passion, of what he had so uncouthly, but sincerely, labored through years to accomplish.

He had planned to take the girl to the gap in the ridge, because it was remote from a railroad and no section stood in greater need of schooling. If she meant to set up a serviceable school in this territory, — unless it were to be limited to one faction of the feud — its doors must stand open at the border, alike to the children of east and west. But now the ridge would be an armed frontier.

Good Anse Talbott was in many ways as inadequate an ally as he had at first seemed to Juanita. He was both narrow and illiterate, but he was earnest. He knew the life and people — and —

"As a Pictish shepherd dog among his Pictish sheep,
So went he in and out of them where they stood breathing deep,
Half frightened and half loving,
He could make them laugh or weep,
Whose lives and deaths were his to him, whose vigil and whose sleep."

In his ignorant zeal, he had thought out many things which she could not realize until she had crossed the first great barrier of prejudice and learned many lessons of sympathy. So she had trusted herself to his guidance, and as they plodded on and he rode in silence, she was puzzled and a little hurt by his uncommunicativeness.

The way at first followed the creek bank, but soon they were climbing steeply upward and the mists went with them; lifting and giving way to the clarity of day. The sun, had appeared above the dim summits now, not yet in the golden triumph of full victory, but like a polished disc of platinum, that slowly passed through pallor to rosiness and through rosiness to flame. A dozen miracles of exquisite and ephemeral beauty hung between sunlight and mist like dreams at the pale heart of an opal. A scrap of bird's-egg blue flashed in the gray sky and a tilting cornfield, far up the mountain, gave back a response of spirit emerald. Upon the foliage of pine and oak and poplar were breathed transitory and gossamer hues that were like

the fugitive souls of colors. At last the veil was rent and the vapors went floating away in tattered wisps and streamers of defeat. Through rifts in the nearer hills rose other hills where the green turned blue with distance to the last line of smoky purple that merged and wedded with the sky.

It was all very beautiful, but she had not come here only to listen to the song of June. So at last the girl rode resolutely up to her escort's saddle-skirts and asked, "Brother Talbott, hadn't you better tell me what it all means?"

The missionary lifted a face that was almost haggard.

"Hit means," he said with no idea of irreverence, "thet Satan's got both under-holts — an' God help this country."

She listened with a sickening heart while he told her many things she needed to know until he changed the subject and assured her that the Widow Everson, with whom she was to stop, had a sizable house where she would be comfortable.

"Are all the houses in this country like the one where we stopped last night?" she inquired.

"No, ma'am," he promptly informed her with a solemnity which belied any spirit of the humorous. "Back a piece in ther hills amongst ther branch-water folks thar's lots of houses whar, es ther sayin' goes, ye hain't hardly got room ter cuss a dawg 'thout gittin' yore teeth full of ha'r. But es fur es thet's consarned," he apologetically added, "a man hain't rightly got no call ter cuss a dawg nohow."

As the day advanced they passed a cabin that stood

barred of door and smokeless of chimney; deserted since yesterday. "Thet house," he told her, "b'longs ter Bud McBriar. He married a Havey an' I reckon they've done moved acrost ther ridge this mornin'."

Juanita looked at the abandoned place and shuddered at the thought of the conditions that had urged such flight.

Yet as they rode through cloistered hollows where the greens were deep and the air moist, and the sun sent only vagrant flakes of gold filtering through the branches it all seemed incredible. The melody of peace and joy poured from the swelling throats of cardinal and thrush down there and tiny shoals of minnows darted about the splashing feet of their mules in creek-bed pools.

The hills grew with their progress until those behind them were only the little brothers of those ahead, for they were steadily plodding toward the ridge of the divide. At last, the girl saw, still a long way off, a fertile little valley where the corn seemed taller and richer than in the scattered "coves" and where across a table-land she could make out a silver thread of water — flowing east. There, like a tiny match-box, on a high level near the point where the wall of mountain broke into a broad gateway she could make out a house. It was not of logs, but of brick, and stood in an enclosure that looked more like the Blue Grass than the mountains. From its chimney went up a thread of smoke blue and straight until it lost itself overhead. Then the missionary drew his mule to a standstill and raised one talon-like hand, pointing across the vista. The girl followed the direction over miles of forest tops and

broken hills; over two narrow and converging valleys; over shadows that were thrown by western peaks and that crept well up the eastern slopes beyond. She nodded her head and caught her breath in a quick, almost gasping intake of sheer admiration.

"Does ye see ther brick house over thar, nigh ther gap? — Thet's Bad Anse's place, an' over thar acrost ther ridge, three mile away by crow-flight an' a half day's ride by ther roads is whar Milt McBriar dwells. Ye kain't see hit from hyar."

Juanita followed his words and his brown index finger and in her heart beat something like the emotions which must have stirred the crusaders when their eyes first looked on the walls of the Jerusalem they had come to take from the Saracen.

It was almost sundown when they reached the house of the Widow Everson, and at sight of the woman standing at the fence to meet them her heart took strength. This house was not of logs, but of undressed boards, with gayly painted window and door frames of red, and though two days ago she would have called it mean, she had revised her views enough to regard it, now, as almost magnificent.

The widow dwelt here with her two sons, and the trio, by virtue of great diplomacy, had succeeded in maintaining a neutrality throughout the strife that went on about them.

The comforts of the place were such as must give contentment where teaming is arduous and the mail carrier comes twice a week, but cleanliness dwelt there, and homely cheer of a sort.

Before they had yet entered the house the girl saw

a horseman approaching, with an escort of several men who carried rifles balanced across their pommels. They came from the east, and though the girl did not know who they were, she recognized that the central figure, himself unarmed, was a person of consequence.

He was tall and under his faded coat his rather lean figure fell into an attitude of well-muscled strength despite his fulness of years. His face though calm, even thoughtful, was more in cut of feature than in expression the face of a man of tense emotions and warlike readiness in quarrel. Indeed, features molded for antagonism and expression of reflective composure seemed paradoxically at variance.

Instinctively her mind flashed back to a bit of remembered description with which five hundred years before a French writer had quaintly depicted another tribal chief whom the laws could not curb, the portrait of the Irish King MacMurrough. . . . "He was tall of stature, well-composed, strong and active; his countenance fell and ferocious to the eye — a man of deed."

Then she heard the man's voice, bland and ingratiating. "'Evenin', ma'am. No, I hain't a-goin' ter light, I jest heered thet Brother Talbott war a-comin' over hyar an' I wanted speech with him."

The missionary nodded. "All right, Milt," he said; and the girl knew, as she had already suspected, that she had before her the second of her chief enemies.

"I reckon ye all knows what happened last night," she heard him saying slowly. "Hit war a pity, an' I hears thet ther Haveys are a-chargin' hit up ergin me. Thet's nat'ral enough, I reckon. They 'lows thet I'd walk plumb acrost hell on a rotten plank ter do 'em

injury. Ef they stopped ter reason hit out a spell they'd *re*collect thet I went over thar ter Peril an' let a Jedge thet didn't own his own soul an' a Jury they hed done packed, clar one of their kin folks fer killin' a cousin of mine . . . an' thet I never raised a hand. I reckon they didn't hardly hev no call ter figger thet I was *skeered* of them. I done what I done because I wanted peace. I was fer lettin' ther law take hit's co'se, even when I knowed the Co'te war crooked es a drunkard's elbow."

He paused and no one spoke, so at last he went on again.

"But Little Nash McKay war young an' hot-hearted. He couldn't hardly see hit in ther light of wisdom and he didn't come ter me fer counsel. So he jest went hell-splittin' over thar with some other boys thet he'd done over-persuaded — an' he didn't come back. . . . I'm sorry. . . . I was right fond of Little Nash, but I hain't complainin' none. He started trouble an' he got hit." Again the dark giant paused; then he came to his point. His voice was regretful, almost sad, but tinged with resignation.

"So Little Nash is a-layin' dead down thar, an' no McBriar durstn't venture down ter fotch his body home." He waved a hand toward the west, and the faces of his escort lowered. They seemed the faces of men who "durst" go anywhere, but their chief went on. "I knowed, Brother Talbott, thet ye sarves Almighty God, an' thet thar hain't no word ye carries but what all men will listen ter ye, so I've done come ter ye, in behalf of Little Nash's maw an' his women folks. I 'lowed I'd ask ye ef ye'd ride down thar and

fotch home ther body?" The missionary nodded and though he was travel-stained and very tired, he responded, "I'll start right now." Then Milt McBriar continued, "An' ef ye sees fit, ye kin tell Anse Havey, thet I hain't a suin' fer peace, but thet I hain't a blamin' him nuther, an' thet ef he wants ther truce ter go on I'm a-willin' ter hev hit thetaway. I hain't holdin' no grudge on account of last night."

CHAPTER X

JUANITA'S eyes grew a little misty as she thought of that desolated cabin where a mother and sisters were grieving for the boy who had been "hot-hearted." Even the sight of his older kinsman who sat his horse with such composure while his eyes wandered off to the purple haze of the far mountains, stirred in her an emotion of sympathy. Of course she knew nothing of the ten acres of "bottom land" which were to be little Nash's when Cal Douglas should have ceased to breathe, nor how it was covetousness and cold thrift rather than a hot heart that had sent him out with his rifle in the night. She did not know that Milt McBriar had torn up several unsigned deeds when the murder squad had failed to earn their contingent fees. She only heard the McBriar say, "I'm much obleeged," and saw him turn his cavalcade east. The tired missionary started his mule west again, and she herself followed the Widow Everson into the house which was for the time to be her home. She went into the tiny, but scrupulously clean room where an ancient bed was gayly spread with a gaudy home-made quilt and where a cracked pitcher and bowl and a broken mirror adorned a home-made washstand, and then as the widow left her, she rummaged in her saddle-bags and drew out a small leather case. She sat for a long while silent, in her shuck-bottomed rocking chair, gaz-

ing wearily out at the west where sunset fires were beginning to kindle, and where an old-rose haze was drowsing over the valley and glowing more brightly in the twisting ribbon of a far-away stream. But her eyes came often back from the panorama out there to dwell a little wistfully on a photograph in the leather frame, and it was the picture of the man whom she had sent away. She was an appealing little figure of loveliness, too frail and flower-like it seemed for hard places, and the present wistfulness of clouded eyes and drooping lips only made her the more appealing, like a bruised blossom whose petals are dust-blown, which needs to be lifted again to the sun and dew. Had the man of the photograph been there just then, when her courage and determination were at ebb tide, and had he stretched out his arms, perhaps she would have shaken her head wearily on abstract resolves and come into their embrace. But he was not there.

In the quaint conversation of the Widow Everson and her sons, Juanita found so much of the amusing that she had to school herself against too great an appreciation of their utterly unintentional humor. Though she was a "fotched-on woman" to be taken on probation it was only a matter of hours before the family capitulated, as people in general had a fashion of doing, under the spell of her graciousness and unself-conscious charm. Jerry Everson, whom men accounted surly, for the first time in years brushed his shapeless hat, and remembered not to "hang it on the floor" and Sim Everson hied him into the misty woods at dawn and brought home squirrels for her first breakfast in his house.

When from the front porch, where the morning-glory vines had been carefully cut away in accordance with the country's distaste for "weeds a trailin' all over the God's blessed face of a dwellin'-house," she saw the mists of the next morning dissipate, she already felt at home. She soon came to recognize that instead of going back east after a cursory inspection to draw plans for school-houses, she must stay here, and, as a condition precedent, win her way naturally into the confidence of those whom she sought to influence. As the widow looked out under her sunbonnet, and the two boys nursed their knees on the edge of the porch, staring at her until she grew painfully conscious of her silk stockinged ankles and short gingham skirt, she knew that even if she could remove all the ivied and towered walls of her own university and set them down as "fur from here as a man kin fling a cow by hit's tail" she still would be no nearer success than she was at this moment. First she must be trusted by a race distrustful of strangers.

In the forenoon of her first day she left the house and, crossing the tiny garden where the weeds were already growing tall and rank enough to hint of future ragged victory, she made her way by a narrow trail that led to the crest of the ridge. The Everson boys watched her go up the steep path and nodded their heads with grins of approval. "Thet gal hain't string-halted none," observed Jerry, and Sim replied hotly, "Stringhalted, hell! Thet gal's plumb supple."

Juanita was steering her course for a patriarchal poplar that sent a straight shaft heavenward at the rim of the crest, opening its verdure like a great flag

unfurled on a mighty parapet. She knew that up there she could look two ways across the divide and that her battle ground would be spread before her.

But when she reached the place her breath came fast with delight for she found there a natural observatory where save for the single poplar, and a few crest plumes rising from the slopes, she had the timber tops all beneath her. There was only open sky above with the world spread out in mosaic below. It was such a place as made one resentful of the lack of wings, and eager to leap upward into the unbroken blue to soar with the hawks and eagles. So at least it seemed to Juanita, but Juanita was imaginative. She had clung to her faith in fairies past the ordinary years of such belief and she still found a fairy-like companionship in the spirit of flowers and trees.

She looked to the east and line after line of hills went over and melted into the sky. She looked to the west and there, too, they rose phalanx on phalanx to dissolve in a smoky haze that effaced the horizon. It looked as if in a majesty of relentlessness they reached from sunrise to sunset, and so, as far as the locked-in-life of their people went, they might.

With precipice and torrent they shut out the world, sweeping away roads and all the changes that roads bring.

They offered sanctuary to the refugee, and safety to their sons in crime and secure eyries to their eagles.

In them all, so far as she knew, was one person, and that person her weak self, who stood for altering them. As she gazed down to the west, she saw the thread of smoke that went up like a contemptuous challenge from

the house of Bad Anse Havey and the square brick walls of his fortress-like abode. Then she looked east and down there, where a creek bed caught the sky like a splinter of blue glass, lay another building with open space about it and cornfields stretching farther away. It was a squat building of logs, and she knew from its size and its block-house stanchness that its thread of smoke went up from the hearth of the McBriar.

Resolutely, she threw back her slender shoulders and quoted some favorite verses.

> "It was morning on hill and stream and tree,
> And morning in the young knight's heart;
> Only the castle moodily
> Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free
> And gloomed by itself apart;
> The season brimmed all other things up
> Full as the rain fills the pitcher plant's cup."

She nodded her head and looked down again. "And the castle," she declared to herself, "sha'n't go on rebuffing. Neither castle. That's what I'm here for."

She knew that it was only two hundred miles east from where she stood to the blue line of the Atlantic coast and that between lay the culture of Virginia, Mother of States. Less than two hundred miles west stretched the rich smoothness of the Blue Grass where the brethren of these same people had won through and founded the "sittlements of Old Kaintuck." But nearer at hand on either side, and infinitely more potential stood the brick house where a long-dead Havey had owned negro slaves, and the log house where a McBriar of other years had cried for abolition, and between them the war was not yet ended.

She stood there a long while and finally she saw where for a little space the road ran near the brick house, unshielded by the woods, a straggling little cortège. At its front rode a stoop-shouldered man in whom even at that far distance she thought she recognized the missionary. Behind him came a few horsemen riding in two squads and between the squads crawled a "jolt-wagon" drawn by mules. She knew that the Haveys were bringing back to the frontier the enemy's dead, and she shuddered at the cold reality. It may have been three hours later that Good Anse Talbott rode up to the Widow Everson's. When the girl, who had returned long ago from the crest, came out to meet him at the door she found him talking there with Milt McBriar who also had ridden up, but from the other direction.

"Anse Havey 'lows," the preacher was saying, "thet he hes done fotched home ther body of Little Nash McKay, an thet ther boy was shot ter death a-layin' in ther la'rel a hundred paces from the winder whar Cal Douglas was a-standin'."

"I've done already acknowledged thet," declared Milt, in a voice into which crept a trace of truculent sullenness.

The missionary nodded. "I hain't quite through yit, Milt," he went on evenly, and the girl who stood leaning against the door frame caught for an instant a sparkle of zealous earnestness in his weary eyes.

"Anse is willin' ter take yore hand on this truce. He's willin' ter stand pledge thet ther Haveys keeps faith. But I'm a preacher of the gawspel of God, Milt,

and I don't 'low ter be no go-between without both of you men *does* keep faith."

Milt McBriar stiffened resentfully and his brows contracted blackly under his hat brim.

"Does ye doubt thet I'll do what I says?" he inquired in a voice too soft for sincerity. The missionary did not drop his steady and compelling eyes from the gaze direct. It was as if he were reading through the pupils of his protagonist, and searching the dark heart.

"I aims ter see thet ye both starts out fair, Milt," he declared still quietly. "An' ter thet end I aims ter admonish ye both on ther terms of this hyar meetin' atween ye."

For an instant Milt McBriar's semblance of calm reflectiveness slipped from him, and his voice rose raspingly. "Did Anse Havey larn ye thet speech?"

Good Anse Talbott shook his head patiently. "No. I told Anse ther same thing I'm a-tellin' you. Neither Anse ner ther four men that fotches ther body will hev any sort of weepon about 'em when they comes acrost thet stile. Ye've got ter give me yore hand, thet none of yore men hain't a-goin' ter be armed. I'm a servant of ther Most High God." For an instant fire blazed in the preacher's eyes and his voice mounted with fervor. "Fer years I've done sought ter teach His grace an' His hatred of murder ter ther people of these hyar hills. . . . When you two men shakes hands on this hyar truce I aims ter be standin' by with a rifle-gun in my hands an' ef I sees anything crooked, I'm goin' ter use hit."

The dark giant stood for a time silent, then he gravely

nodded his head. "Them terms suits me," he said briefly.

The two men walked down to the fence and separated there, going in opposite directions.

A few minutes later Juanita, still standing fascinatedly in the doorway was looking out across the shoulder of the missionary. He presided at the threshold with grave eyes, and, even after these peaceful years with something of familiar caress in the way his brown hand lay on his rifle lock. Then the girl saw a strange and primitive ratification of treaty.

On either side of the little porch was gathered a group of solemn men, mostly bearded, mostly coatless and all unarmed. In front of those, at the right, stood Anse Havey, his eyes still the dominant feature of the picture.

Over across from him was the taller and older chieftain of the other clan. They held the picture gravely, with a courtesy that cloaked their hatred. Out in the road was the "jolt-wagon" and in its deep bed the girl could see the canvas that covered its burden. As Bad Anse took his place at the front of his escort, his gaze met that of Juanita. He did not speak, but for an instant she saw his face harden and his eyes narrow and his lips set themselves. It was the glance of one who has been lashed across the face and who cannot strike back, but who will not soon forget.

This time the girl's eyes did not drop and certainly they held no hint of relenting or plea for forgiveness.

The head of the Haveys turned from her and began speaking. "I got your message, Milt," he said

casually, "an' I reckon you got my answer. I've brought back Little Nash."

"I'm obleeged ter ye." The McBriar paused, then volunteered: "Ef ther boy had took counsel of me this thing wouldn't never hev happened."

For some moments Bad Anse Havey looked deep into his enemy's eyes, then he nodded.

"Milt," he carelessly announced, while the ghost of an ironical smile played in his eyes though it left his lips grave, "I've got several hosses an' mules down thar in my barn that we found hitched out in ther timber when Nash an' his friends took to the la'rel." Again he paused and studied the faces of the McBriar men before he went on. "One of 'em is your own roan mare, Milt. One of 'em b'longs ter Sam thar and one of 'em is Bob's thar." He pointed out each man as he spoke. "Ye can get 'em any time ye send down thar for 'em."

The girl caught her breath, and despite her dislike acknowledged the cool insolence with which Anse had parried Milt's disclaimer of any foreknowledge of a plot. The McBriar replied only with a scowl; so Anse contemplatively continued, as though to himself,

"It's right smart of a pity for a feller thet goes out shootin' in the night-time to take a kinsman's horse — without askin' his counsel. It *might* lead to some misunderstandin'."

A baleful glare flashed deep in the eyes of the taller man, and from the henchmen at his back came an uneasy shuffle of brogans.

But the voice of Good Anse Talbott interrupted and relieved the tension. "Stiddy thar, men," he quietly

admonished, "you-all didn't hardly meet hyar ter talk 'bout hosses nohow. I'll lead them nags back myself, Milt."

Anse Havey stepped forward and extended his hand.

"I gives ye my hand, Milt McBriar," he said, "thet there truce goes on."

"An' I gives ye mine," rejoined the other.

After a perfunctory shake the two turned together and went down the steps. The girl saw both squads lifting the covered burden from the wagon and carrying it around the turn of the road where a second wagon waited. She believed that the feud was ended, but it is doubtful if either of the principals whose hands had joined, parted with great trust in the integrity of the other's intentions. It is certain that one of them at least was already making plans for the future, not at all in accordance with that compact of peace.

CHAPTER XI

AS days grew into weeks Bad Anse Havey heard nothing of the establishing of a school at the head of Tribulation, though all the gossip of the countryside which might interest a dictator filtered through the valleys and gorges to his house.

He smiled a little over the copy of Plutarch's "Lives," which was the companion of his leisure moments, and held his counsel. While he thought of Juanita herself with a resentment which sprang from hurt pride, he felt for her, as a menace to his power, only contempt. But Juanita's resolve had in no wise weakened. She had seen that her original ideas had all been chaotic and born of ignorance, and she was, like a good and patient general, pulling all the pins out of her little war map and drafting a completely new plan of campaign.

There was no weakening of resolve. Each day she went up to the tall poplar that commanded the valleys, east and west, and each morning with the glint of battle in her violet eyes she repeated to herself in anathema on both houses "*Carthago delenda est.*"

She meant to spend as much time as was necessary in simply learning to know these people and making them feel her sympathy. With Good Anse Talbott, she rode up dwindling water courses to the hovels of the "branch-water folks" and accompanied him where-

soever the cry of sickness or distress sent up its call, and since his introduction was an open sesame, she found welcomes where she went.

Dust-covered in the station at Peril, were trunks which she had not been able to bring across the creek-beds and quicksands, and she smiled as she thought of a still more insane piece of foolishness of which she had been guilty in her dense initial ignorance. Besides the trunks there stood there in the little baggage-room a crated piano! Whenever she saw a patient teamster struggling and maneuvering for ten minutes over one twisting series of broken ledges or "man-powering" out of the way fallen wreckage of last night's storm she thought of that piano and laughed.

But even the small wardrobe of her saddle-bags was beyond her needs now. To be too obviously a "furriner" meant to appear, in native eyes, "stuck-up" and to lose influence. So she adopted plain calicos and sunbonnets like those worn by the women about her, though even native severity of line and material could not take from her figure its trim distinction of grace and beauty. Just as she amended her dress so she also amended her speech to simplified and homely words.

It was all a very sincere effort to adapt herself, a passionate determination. . . .

"In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain."

And soon the slight figure, that walked with an almost lyric grace, yet with a boyish strength and litheness, became familiar along the roads and trails.

Instead of asking, "Who mout thet be?" mountaineers nodded and said, "Thet's *her;*" and some women added, "God bless thet child."

She had been into many gloomy cabins that repelled the brightness of the summer sun, and she had been more like sunlight than anything that had ever come through their narrow doors before. The children loved her and she loved them. And she marveled at their numbers. It was June and it seemed to her that in almost every family a new baby was struggling through its first months of unsanitary gloom and squalor. She looked at their mothers, prematurely old by the pain of their frequent coming, then at their gaunt, sullen fathers and she prayerfully resolved that these newcomers should know the wholesomeness of life; should be liberated from their heritage of drudgery and hate.

One wild afternoon Good Anse stopped by the gate and called to her. Clouds were piling and tumbling along the ridges in angry ramparts of raw and leaden heaviness. Now and then a cannonading of thunder rumbled with its echoes through the mountains. Already great drops were falling and the missionary's slicker shone like black armor.

"Thar's a-goin' ter be a bornin' at ther Calloway house, I reckon," he said simply. "Thar hain't no doctor nigher than Peril an' ther woman's mighty puny. I reckon ye durstn't hardly ride over thar, would ye?" Then he added, "Hit's ten mile by crow-flight an' hit's a-comin' on ter storm."

The preacher, who from the spur of necessity was something of a doctor, too, scowled on her, as he always scowled when something was tearing his breast which he wished to hide, but the scowl softened when ten minutes later she was riding beside him. The rain had already become a lashing downpour, and the twilight was rent by garish sheets of lightning. At last Good Anse said slowly: "I don't hardly feel fitten ter try ter do nuthin'. Ye see —" He broke off and when he looked round at her again the face under his dripping hat brim was whiter even than the lightning should have limned it, as his voice rose in contention with the thunder. "Calloway's wife hain't much ter look at now. She's plumb broke, but wunst she war ther purtiest gal on Meetin' House Fork. In them days they called me Hell-cat Talbott — an' hit war God's will thet she wouldn't marry me."

The girl never forgot that night of thunder and squalor and suspense. The night long she watched beside the wretched, pain-racked woman and fought for two lives by the light of a fire into which the rain sputtered down the low, wide chimney. At the hearth sat two men. One clutched his face and combed nervously at his unkempt beard with talon-like fingers. He rocked from side to side and groaned, brokenly, deep in his throat. The other sat unmoving and stared, wide-eyed, at the smoke-blackened stones of the fireplace. Often, too, he knelt and the fire shone on spasmodic lips moving in prayer. So they waited; the husband and the discarded lover.

The rain drove and rattled like shot against the slab roof, and some of it dripped through. The storm went

shrieking and volleying through the hills where the timber bent to its savage buffeting. Over it all rolled the artillery of the thunder and now and again came the death crash of some forest patriarch that had given way after centuries.

Juanita kept vigil and thanked God for her little knowledge of medicine and the use of chloroform.

When day came at last and a tiny bundle of humanity lay beside its wasted, but faintly smiling mother, she carried away, in reward for the night-long watch an incoherent "God bless ye," from bearded lips.

She sometimes rode over to the cabin of Fletch McNash and brought little Dawn back with her to spend a day or two. Then foreign girl and mountain girl wandered together in the woods, and Dawn's diffidence gave way and her adoration grew. Twice Juanita found another visitor at the McNash cabin — Bad Anse Havey. He recognized her only with a haughty nod like that of an Indian chief and she gave him in return a slight inclination of her head, accompanied by a glance of starry contempt from her violet eyes. Yet in the attitude of the mountaineers toward the man, she saw such hero-worship as might have been accorded to some democratic young monarch walking freely among his subjects.

As he talked they hung on his words. Jeb listened as to a prophet and even Dawn sat with her chin in her hands and her gaze fixed upon his deep gray eyes.

Sometime Juanita felt the gray pupils focused on her and under their scrutiny, back of which gleamed mingled anger and a sort of amused scorn that galled her, she grew strangely uneasy.

Once Fletch said, "Ma'am, how's yore school a-comin' on? Air ye gittin' things started ter suit ye?"

Juanita flushed. "Not yet," she answered. "I'm trying to get acquainted first. When I do start I hope to make up for lost time."

"I reckon that school will be a right-good thing over thar, don't ye 'low so, Anse?" inquired Fletch, whose good-natured density had not sensed the tacit hostility between his two guests.

Anse laughed quietly. "I reckon," he non-committally replied, "so long as the lady just keeps on sayin' 'not yet' thar won't be no harm done."

The lady flushed and a hot retort rose to her lips, but she only turned to Fletch and smiled.

"I'm biding my time, Fletch," she assured him. "My dream will come true."

As the days went by she charged up to Anse Havey's heavy scroll of offense something more concrete. Juanita Holland was building a structure of dreams; and as she sat alone in the woods or looked out of the single window of her room she liked to imagine its fulfilment out there between the bases of the hills. For her dream's fulfilment she must have land. Her site must be large enough not only for the first log schoolhouse or two, but for the larger institution, into which it was to grow. There must be dormitories for boys and girls and playgrounds where muscles and brains grown slow from heavy-harness could be quickened. She fancied herself listening to the laughter of children who had not before learned to laugh.

That should be the first thing taught, but even above that rose another dream. On some green hill-

side should stand her tiny, but model hospital, with a "fotched-on" trained nurse in attendance and white cots ranged in clean rows to which the sick might come. From comfortless beds in musty cabins women might be brought to have God's sun and air and cleanliness attend upon the birth of their children. As she made inquiries of land-holders whom a price might tempt to sell, she was met everywhere with a reserve which puzzled her until a bare-footed and slouching farmer gave her a hint.

This man rubbed his brown toe in the dust and spoke in a lowered voice.

"I don't mind a-tellin' ye thet I'd be plumb willin' ter sell out an' move —" his eyes shone greedily as he added, "fer a fair figger, but I moutn't live ter move ef I sold out."

"What do you mean?" she asked, much puzzled.

"Wall, I wouldn't hardly like ter hev this travel back ter Bad Anse, but I've done been admonished not ter make no trades with strangers."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in a low voice as her face flushed wrathfully. "Whom does your land belong to?" she demanded after a moment's indignant silence. "Are you a bondman to Bad Anse Havey? Isn't your property your own?"

He looked away and rummaged in his pockets for a few crumbs of leaf tobacco, then he commented with the dreary philosophy of hopelessness, "Hit's a God's blessed truth thet a feller hyarabouts is plumb lucky es long as his *life's* his own."

So, she told herself, Bad Anse had begun his war with boycott! She could not even buy a foothold on

which to begin her fight. Back there in the Philadelphia banks lay enough money, she bitterly reflected, to buy the County at an inflated price; to bribe its Courts; to hire assassins and snuff out human lives, yet, since the edict of one man carried the force of terror, she could not buy a few acres to teach little children and care for the sick. At least it was a confession that, for all his fine pretense of scorn, the man recognized and feared the potentiality of her efforts.

CHAPTER XII

AS the bright greens of June were scorched into dustier hues of July and the little spears of corn grew taller, she began to feel conscious of a certain drawing back, even of those who had been her warm admirers and to notice scowls on strange faces as they eyed her.

Somewhere a poison squad was at work. Of that she felt sure, and her eyes flashed militant anger as she thought of its authorship. Each day brought her new warnings, offered under the semblance of kindness and friendship.

"Folks hereabouts liked her powerful well, but hit warn't hardly likely thet Bad Anse, ner Milt McBriar would suffer her ter go forward with her projecks. They'd done been holdin' off 'cause she war a woman, an' she'd better quit of her own behest." So they were willing to let her surrender with the honors of war! Her lips tightened.

In answer to detailed questioning her informant would invariably shake his head vaguely and suspect that "hit warn't rightly none of his business nohow, he just 'lowed hit war a kindly act ter give her timely warnin'."

Old Bob McGreeger had a water mill a half mile from the Widow Everson's house, and had there been competition in his neighborhood, his trade would have

died, for the tongue in old Bob's head was a member given to truculent bitterness, and his temper was the channel through which the dyspepsia that racked him, found torrential outlet. It was intimated that the spring which crept down through the laurel thickets above his house, often brought on its surface floating grains of yellow corn. As to the significance of these kernels, mountain etiquette remained silent. Yet the floating particles were *prima facie* evidence of the proximity of a moonshine still and distilling under such circumstances engenders a steadfast distaste for innovations hinting at a change of order.

Be that as it may, Old Bob was, in word of mouth, the most violent man in the hills. In his code of honor the one unforgivable sin was forgiveness, and peace was the one contemptible weakness. His body was knife-slashed, bullet-pitted and marked of fist and human tooth and out of no battle had he ever emerged victorious.

"Nobody kain't nuver l'arn ol' Bob nuthin'," Jerry Everson told Juanita one day. "Some fellers fights 'cause they kin fight, an' some fellers gets persuaded by-and-by that they *kain't* fight an' quits tryin', but Ol' Bob kain't fight an' kain't quit. He's in ther hell of a sorry fix, Ol' Bob is."

And so despite his troublesome proclivities, the mountain folk regarded him rather humorously and made allowances for his idiosyncrasies.

One Sunday afternoon the girl was standing at the stile of the Widow's house with Jerry at her elbow when Old Bob came "jest broguein' down the road." He was a strange sight in his bare feet, his ragged trousers

and the faded Prince Albert coat, which had drifted into his ownership a quarter of a century ago and been donned every Sabbath since. He completed his anomalous costume with a battered straw hat and a much spotted red necktie at his collarless throat. He rapped the road as he came with a long hickory staff, and his face, masked in ragged iron-gray whiskers, worked like a rabbit's with his mutterings.

But he paused at the gate and stood there scowling villainously at the girl.

"Is thet *her?*" he exploded at the end of his scrutiny.

"Thet," said Jerry, who was now the girl's dumb admirer, "is Miss Holland: Miss Juanita Holland."

"Hit's ther hell of a name fer any gal," observed the old man, still boring into her face with hostile eyes. "How much longer do she 'low ter tarry in these parts?"

The girl flushed scarlet, and then telling herself that this was one of the deficients whom the hill people call "fitty," she turned away and looked down the road.

"Folks round hyar," said Jerry slowly and in an ominously quiet voice, "hopes thet she stays a long spell."

"Like hell they does!" ripped out the gray-bearded moonshiner fiercely. "Ther only folks thet wishes thet air them thet eats with the McBriars an' drinks with ther Haveys an' tells lies ter both on 'em. Shore-'nough folks hain't honin' ter hev no fotched-on women spreadin' new-fangled notions of corruption through ther country. What's more they hain't a-goin' ter

suffer hit much longer. Bad Anse is gittin' damn tired of puttin' up with sich, jest because hits a woman."

Juanita Holland wheeled, stung into speech at last.

"I reckon," she said quietly, falling unconsciously into the idiom, while her cheeks blazed, "there isn't much danger."

"No, by God," flared the man, "hit hain't danger, hit's a plumb sartainty."

Then Jerry Everson crossed the stile.

"Uncle Bob," he said slowly, "I reckon ye've done talked plenty. Begone now whilst ye've got a chanst."

Bob McGreeger broke into a volley of fiery oaths, but the young mountaineer silenced him with a vice-like grip on his shoulder.

"Folks," he said, "hev been makin' hit a practise ter take a heap offen ye, because ye've got gray ha'r an' a weak mind. In p'int of fact one more lickin' wouldn't harm ye none, an' ef ye hain't plumb heedful ye're a goin' ter git hit right now."

The girl, genuinely anxious for the old man, started across the stile to intercede, but with a sudden change of mood her heckler turned and started ambling up the road, rumbling as he went. Jerry, whose anger had died as suddenly as it had flared, sung after him tauntingly. "Uncle Bob, ye hadn't oughter go round seekin' fights. Some day ye're liable ter meet up with a right-puny feller thet ye kin lick, an' then yore rep'tation'll be plumb eternally gone ter hell."

But the girl that night thought long and gloomily over the outbreak of the drunken miller.

During those weeks of June and the first half of

July the mountains seemed to breathe freer, because of the truce pledged by the two leaders, and the men of both clans walked in seeming security, through the enemy's territory. None the less, secret and silent investigations were going forward, and when the answer to them came the seeming of peace would burst like a pricked bubble. The grievance that had been rankling in McBriar breasts since the night of the dance had lost none of its soreness. Who killed Nash McKay? Bad Anse Havey knew that the plighted assurances of his enemy would not long outlast the answering of that question and he was not resting idle.

Juanita Holland had bought a small piece of ground from the Widow Everson, near her own house, and upon it a cabin was being reared.

. . . . . .

One afternoon, while old Milt McBriar was sitting on the porch of his house, a horseman rode up and "lighted." The horseman was not a pleasant person of visage or expression, but he knew his mission and was sure of his welcome.

"Evenin', Luke," welcomed the McBriar chief.

As the visitor sank into a chair with a nod he laconically announced:

"I've done found out who kilt Nash McKay."

Old Milt never showed surprise. It was his pride that his features had banished all register of emotion. Now he merely leaned over and knocked the ash from his pipe against the railing. "Wall," he commanded curtly, "let's hev yore tale."

"Them Haveys picked out a man thet hain't been mixed up in no feud fightin' heretofore," pursued the

other with unruffled calmness. "He's a feller thet nobody wouldn't hardly suspect; him bein' peaceable an' mostly sober. But he shoots his squirrels through the head every time he throws up his rifle-gun. Thet war ther kind of man they wanted."

Milt McBriar shifted his position a little. He seemed bored.

"Who war this feller?"

The bearer of tidings was reserving his climax and refused to be hurried.

"I reckon ye'll be right-smart astonished when I names his name, but thar hain't no chanst of bein' mistook. I've done run ther thing down."

"I hain't nuver astonished," retorted McBriar. "Who war he?"

Very cautiously the second man looked around and then bent over and whispered a name. If Milt McBriar did not show surprise at its mention it was because he made a conscious effort. At last he laughed unpleasantly and commented, "Thet war like Anse Havey. He's kind of fond of doin' things thet ye wouldn't hardly 'low he *would* do." After a short pause the chief added, "Wall, I reckon I don't need ter tell yer what ter do now?"

"I reckon I knows," confessed Luke with a somewhat surly expression. "Why don't ye foller Anse's lead an' use a new man oncet in a while?"

"Oh, I reckon ye'll do, Luke, an' atter ye does hit, ye'd better leave ther mountings fer a spell."

The surliness deepened. "Hell!" muttered the henchman. But Milt McBriar was paying no attention. His face was darkening. "I wish I could af-

ford ter git ther *real* man," he exclaimed abruptly, "I wish I durst hev Anse Havey kilt."

"Wall —" this time it was the underling who spoke casually —"I reckon I mout as well die fer a sheep as a lamb. Shell I kill Anse Havey fer ye?"

The chieftain looked at him during a long pause, then slowly shook his head.

"No, Luke," he said quietly, "I hain't quite ready ter die myself yit. I reckon if I hed ye ter kill Pad Anse thet's 'bout what'd happen. Jest git ther lamb this trip an' let ther old ram live a spell."

So one unspeakably sultry morning a few days after that informal session, Good Anse Talbott appeared at the door of the Widow Everson's house. As Juanita Holland appeared in the door to greet him he came to the point without persiflage.

"Fletch McNash hes done been kilt," he said. "'Bout twilight last night es he war a-comin' in from ther barn somebody shot one shoot from ther la'rel. I reckon hit'd be right-smart comfort ter his woman an' little Dawn ef ye could ride over thar an' help 'tend ter ther buryin'. Kin ye start now?"

CHAPTER XIII

GO! Juanita would go if it were necessary to run a gantlet of all the combined forces of the Haveys and McBriars. Her heart ached for the widow and the boys, but for Dawn the ache was as deeply poignant as it could have been for a little sister of her own. The child had brought to her her one truly personal association in the mountains. Their intimacy had been to Juanita a solace and a substitute for all the things she had put behind, things that left emptiness and ache in her heart. To-day her little protégée was a child. To-morrow she would be a woman and the day after — the girl shuddered as she reflected on the Calloway woman who had a few years ago been the "purtiest gal on Meetin' House Fork." Dawn and girls like her were the stake for which she had come here to fight. It was such lives she meant to redeem. Now across the lot of this joyous little creature had fallen the shadow of the seemingly inevitable — of the grim, sullen home-breaking thing that brooded here, feeding on human life. So it was with set face and hot indignation of heart that she mounted for the journey.

Yet in the rancor of her unreasoning anger it was not upon the actual assassin that her censure chiefly burned. She chose rather to go back of all that and think of Anse Havey as the human incarnation; the head and front of the whole wretched, blood-drenched

régime. He seemed even more responsible than Milt McBriar because his lawless fame had gone more picturesquely abroad.

As they rode the hills were full of midsummer languor. The trees were unstirring in the hushed heat. Only the minnows in the little pools and the geese that waddled down to the cool waters seemed free of torpidness and lethargy. The locusts and grasshoppers sang from dry roadside stalks and flew rattling away from the ironweeds and thistles as they passed.

The horses kicked up clouds of choking dust and along the edges of the shrunken streams little clusters of white and pale-yellow butterflies fluttered wearily.

The houses, where a roof broke through the timber, were sullen, too, and closed of door, despite the heat, but Juanita no longer thought of them as hovels where men and women closely akin to the dumb beasts lived as in dens. Love and hate and hope and despair, she had learned, burn as fiercely there as elsewhere and though more nakedly, perhaps more honestly. The poverty which it had, at first, seemed must strangle to death everything but animal instinct, was robbed of its abjectness. Its self-denial was a compromise only with necessity, never with self-respect. The same Spartan spirit had animated Kenton and Boone when they discarded every non-essential from their pioneer packs. She herself was in effect as poor as they, because her possessions lay beyond ramparts of granite and sandstone. So much had the girl Juanita grown under the teachings of those she had come to teach.

At last they reached the McNash cabin and found gathered about it a score of figures with sullen and

scowling faces. As she crossed the yard the crowd opened for her and gazed after her respectfully. Even the missionary did not cross the threshold with her, but let her enter alone on her errand of comforting the "women folks" who were in there with their dead. From the barn came the screech of saw and rat-tat of hammer, where those whose knack ran to carpentry were fashioning the box which was to serve in lieu of a casket.

There was no fire now and the cabin was very dark. In a deeply shadowed corner lay Fletch McNash, made visible by the white sheet that covered him. That sheet had been borrowed from a neighbor who "made it a p'int ter hev things handy fer buryin's." It had served the same purpose before and would again.

Juanita had come in silently and for a moment thought that no one else was there, and that she was alone with death. The younger children had been sent away and the neighbors remained outside with rough sense of consideration. Among them was no excitement; they smoked stoically and talked of indifferent topics. Death was a neighbor near whom they had always lived, and this case was like many others.

Then as Juanita stood just inside the lintel, she heard a low moan and crossed the room.

There in a squat chair near the dead hearth sat Mrs. McNash, with her back turned to the room. She was leaning forward and gazing ahead with unseeing eyes. Dawn was kneeling at her side with both arms about her mother's drooping shoulders. It was from Dawn, whose tear-stained face was wan and white, that the groan had come. The elder woman had uttered no

sound. For hours she had been sitting there in just that attitude, tearless and mute, with a face that was as drawn and taut as though parchment instead of skin was stretched across the bones of her skull. Sometimes a spasm of shaking ran through her body like a chill, but except for that she neither moved nor spoke. It was the still grief of the mountain woman which finds no outlet and instills into her offspring a wormwood and thirst for vengeance with their suckling.

Juanita bent and impulsively kissed the withered face, but the woman only stirred a little like a half-awakened sleeper and looked stolidly up. After a while she spoke in the lifeless, far-away tone of utter lethargy.

"Ef ye'd like ter see him, jest lift up ther sheet. . . . He's a-layin' thar." Then once more she sank back into the coma of her staring at the hearth with its dead ashes. But Dawn had not looked tragedy in the face so long that it had made her the stoic. She was wild only as the song bird is wild and not as the hunted animal. She rose and stood shaken with deep sobs, and putting both hands out before her, came gropingly and blind with tears into the outstretched arms of Juanita Holland.

Then the door opened, letting in two men, and in them Juanita recognized Jeb McNash and Bad Anse Havey.

At their coming Dawn looked up, and drawing away from the embrace of the older girl, retreated silently to a corner as though ashamed of having been discovered in tears. For a few moments there was silence in the

room, complete except for the rap of Jeb's pipe when he knocked out its ashes against the chimney.

Bad Anse stood with folded arms in the dim light and gave no sign that he had recognized the presence of the foreign woman.

The boy jerked his head toward the hearth and said in a strained, hard voice, "Set ye a cheer, Anse," and after that no one spoke. Jeb's thin, but muscular chest rose and fell to the swell of heavy breathing, and his face was wrapped black in a scowl that made his eyes smolder and his lips snarl. Juanita had dropped back to one of the beds where she sat with Dawn's face buried in her lap. She studied the faces which were all shadow faces in the dimness, but which grew in distinctness when her eyes became accustomed to the dark, standing out more clearly just as features painted on an old, discolored canvas come out under an intent gaze.

But even in the murk Anse Havey's eyes shone clear and insistent, and held her gaze with an almost uncanny fascination. It was difficult to remember all the villainies of which she believed him guilty when she could actually see him, for the face was that of a strong fighting philosopher, who acts swiftly and surely, but who thinks even more swiftly and surely. As she looked at him she told herself that she hated him the more for his hypnotic eyes — they gave him much of his evil power over men.

Then as if rousing from a long dream Mrs. McNash lifted her gaze and for the first time appeared to realize that her son and his companion had entered the place.

The dead blankness left her pupils and into them

leaped a hateful fire. Her voice came in shrill and high-pitched questioning: "Wall, Jeb, hev ye got him yit?"

The boy only shook his head and glowered at the wall while his mother's voice rose almost to a scream.

"Hain't ye a-goin' ter do nothin'? Thar lays yore pap what nuver harmed no man, shot down cold-blooded. Don't ye hear him a-callin' on yer ter settle his blood-score? Air ye skeered? Ther sperit of him thet fathered ye air a-pleadin' with ye from his shroud — an' ye sets still in yore cheer an' twiddles yore thumbs!"

Juanita felt the slender figure in her embrace shudder at the lashing invective that fell from the mother's crazed lips. She saw the boy's face whiten; saw him rise and turn to Bad Anse Havey, half in ferocity, half in pleading.

"Maw's right, Anse," he doggedly declared. "I kain't tarry hyar no longer. He b'longs ter me. . . . I've got ter go out an' kill him. Thar hain't but one thing a-stoppin' me now," he added helplessly. "I don't know who did hit. I hain't got no notion."

He stood before the clan chief and the clan chief rose and laid one hand on the shoulder which had begun to tremble. Man and boy looked at each other, eye to eye, then the elder of the two began to speak.

"Jeb, I don't want ye to think I don't feel for ye, but ye don't know who the feller is, an' ye can't hardly go shootin' permiscuous. Ye've got to bide your time."

"But," interrupted the boy tensely, "*you* knows. You knows everything hyarabouts. In God's name,

"Maw's right, Anse," he doggedly declared. "I kain't tarry hyar no longer. He b'longs ter me."

Anse, I hain't askin' nothin' out of ye but jest one word. Jest speak one name, thet's all I needs."

The mother had dropped back into her stupor again and her son stood there, his broganed feet wide apart and his whole body rigid and taut with passion.

Anse Havey once more shook his head.

"No, Jeb," he said quietly, "I don't know neither — not yet. The McBriars acted on suspicion — an' they killed the wrong man. Ye ain't seekin' to do likewise, be ye? Ye ain't quite twenty-one, Jeb, an' I'm the head of the family. I reckon ye'd better take counsel of me, boy. I ain't bent on deludin' ye an' ye can trust me. Ye've got to give me your hand, Jeb, that until we're plumb, everlastin'ly sartain who got your pa, ye won't raise your gun against any man. I want ye to give me your solemn pledge on that."

The boy sank down into his chair and bowed his head in his hands while his finger nails bit into his temples. Even Juanita Holland had felt the effect of Havey's wonderfully quieting voice and personality. Finally Jeb McNash raised his face.

"An' will ye give me yore hand, Anse Havey, thet if ye finds hit out afore I do, ye'll tell me thet man's name?"

"I ain't never turned my back on a kinsman yet, Jeb," Anse gravely reminded him.

The boy nodded his acquiescence and hurriedly left the room. Juanita gently lifted Dawn's head from her lap and went forward to the hearth.

She had listened in silence, outraged at this callous talk and this private usurpation of powers of life and death. Now it seemed to her that to remain longer si-

lent would be almost to become an accomplice. Something in her grew rigid. She saw the bent and lethargic figure of the bereaved wife and the stark, sheeted body of the feud's last victim. Before her stood the man more than any one else responsible for such conditions.

"Mr. Havey," she said as her voice grew coldly purposeful, with the ring of challenge, "I have been told that you did not mean to let me stay here; that you did not intend to give these poor children the chance to grow straight and decent." She paused because so much was struggling indignantly for utterance that she found the ordering of her words very difficult. And as she paused she heard him inquire in an ironically quiet voice, "Who told ye that?"

"Never mind who told me. I haven't come here to answer your questions. I came to these feud-cursed hills to fight conditions for which you stand as sponsor and patron saint. I came here to try to give the children release from ignorance — because ignorance makes them easy tools and dupes for murder lords — like you."

Again her tumult of spirit halted her and she heard Dawn sobbing with grief and fright on the bed.

"Are ye through?" inquired Anse Havey. His voice had the flinty quiet of cruelly repressed passion, and his face had whitened, but he had not moved.

"No, I'm not through," she went on with rising vehemence. "I came here seeking to interfere with no man's affairs . . . wishing only to give your people, without price, what they are entitled to . . . the light that all the rest of the world enjoys. I found

the community bound hand and foot in slavery to two men of a like stripe. I found their hirelings murdering each other from ambush. I'm only a woman, but I carry the credentials of decency and civilization. You two have everything else — everything *except* decency and civilization. . . . You and Milt McBriar!"

He had listened while the muscles of his jaws stood out in cramped tensity and the veins began to cord themselves on his temples. Now he said in a low voice between his teeth: "By God, don't liken me to Milt McBriar."

The girl laughed, a little hysterically and wildly, then swept on.

"I do liken you to Milt McBriar. What in God's name is the difference between you? He kills your vassals and you kill his. Both of you do it by the proxy of hirelings and from ambuscade. In this house a man lies dead — dead for no quarrel of his own, but because of your quarrel with Milt McBriar. But it seems that's not enough. You must enlist the son of the dead man into a life that will have the same end for him. . . . You bind him apprentice to your merciless code of murder." Her hands were clenched and her eyes burning with her tempest of rage. When she stopped speaking the man inquired once again: "Are ye through now?" But Juanita swept both hands out and added:

"You have taken the boy — very well. I mean to take the girl. I shall try to undo in her and in her children the evil you will do her brother. I shall try to give the family one unblighted branch. Unless you kill me I shall stay here and fight. I'll fight you and

your enemy, McBriar, alike because you are only two sides of the same coin. . . . I'll try to take the ground out from under your feet and leave you no standing room outside a State's prison. . . . Dawn shall learn the things that will, some day, set this country free."

Mrs. McNash was looking up vaguely, but her thoughts were still far away, and this outpouring of speech near at hand meant little to her.

Juanita as she finished her wild peroration fell suddenly to trembling. Her strength seemed to have gone out with her words. Her knees, now that the effort was made, seemed too weak to support her, and for the first time in her life, as she looked into the face of Anse Havey, a face ominously blanched with rage, hurt pride and bitterness, she was physically afraid of a man.

His eyes seemed to pierce her with the stabs of rapiers and in his quiet self-repression was something very ominous. For a moment he did not permit himself to speak, then he thrust a chair forward and said in a level and toneless sort of voice: "If ye're all through now, mebby ye'd better sit down. Such eloquence as that's liable ter tire ye out right smartly."

The girl made no move to take the chair, and Anse Havey came one step forward and pointed to it. This time his voice came quick and sharp like the crack of a mule whip. "Sit down I tell ye! I've got just a few words ter say my own self."

CHAPTER XIV

DAWN drew back on the quilted feather bed, her fingers twisting about one another in an excess of nervous disquiet. Never before had she heard any one, man or woman, venture a word of rebellion or defiance to Bad Anse Havey. It had not occurred to her that there was in the world a person bold enough to do so. The mountain child felt almost as if she were a prize being fought for; fought for bitterly by two people whom she held in that high awe accorded to deities.

For a few moments Bad Anse Havey said nothing more and the Eastern girl dropped almost limply into the chair which he had pushed forward, while he, himself, paced the narrow length of the room, pausing once to gaze down at the rigid body of the dead man. At last he came and took his place squarely before her by the hearth with both hands thrust deep into his coat pockets. A long black lock fell over his forehead and he impatiently shook it back.

"Dawn," he said finally, "I wish ye'd go to the door an' tell one of them fellers out there not ter let no one come in till I'm through."

"So you mean to keep me prisoner here while you attempt to intimidate me?" inquired the elder girl a little scornfully. "I suppose I might have expected that. It doesn't frighten me, however."

"Wait a minute, Dawn!" countermanded Havey, still speaking in a low and unexcited voice. "Is there any person out thar, ma'am, ye'd like to have come in? I 'lowed that in here, whar we both come to try ter help friends in affliction, ye'd know nothin' couldn't harm ye."

Juanita's cheeks betrayed her annoyance with a deep flush. She had meant to be bitterly ironical; and this barbarian had parried her thrust with a dignity greater than her own. "Please go on," she said. "I've already told you that I'm not yet terrorized."

"In the first place," he began in his deliberate voice, "ye've said some things thet I doubt not ye believe to be true, but they're 'most all of 'em lies." He flung back his head and looked squarely down at her, his eyes narrow and snapping, but with his voice pitched to a low cadence.

"Ye've said things that, since ye're a woman, I ain't got any way of answerin'. I listened to all them things an' I didn't interrupt ye. The only thing I asks of ye, is thet now ye hearken to what *I* want to say."

"Go on. I'm listening with humble attention."

"Ye've called me a murderer an' a hirer of murderers. That's a lie. I've never killed no man that didn't have his face t'ords me, nor one that wasn't armed. I've never hired any man killed.

"Ye've likened me to Milt McBriar. . . . Thet was a lie, too. Ye've said some right-bitter things, an' I can't answer ye. If ye was a man I could."

"And if I were a man, what would you say to me?" she inquired.

"I reckon"—his words came with an icy cold-

ness —" I'd be pretty liable to tell ye to eternally go to hell."

" And if I were a man," she promptly retorted, " I'd endeavor with every ounce of manhood I had in me to see that you, and the others like you, *did* go there. I'd try to see that you went the appropriate way, through the trap of the gallows."

She saw his attitude stiffen and his face flush brick-red to the cheek-bones. But after a few seconds she heard him speak with a fair counterfeit of amusement.

" Wall, it 'pears like we've both got to be right-smart disappointed — on account of your bein' a woman."

And that time it was she who flushed.

" I don't hardly know why I'm takin' the trouble to make any statement to ye," mused Anse Havey. " It ain't hardly worth while. Ye came up here with your mind fixed. Ye've read a lot of hearsay stuff in newspapers, an' facts ain't hardly apt to count for much. . . . I reckon afore ye decides to hang me ye'll let me have my day in Court, won't ye? "

" Before your own Judge and your own Jury? " she naïvely asked him. " That's the way you usually have your day in Court, isn't it, Mr. Havey? "

" It's you that's settin' as the Court just now," he disconcertingly reminded her. " I reckon ye can judge for yeself how much I owns ye."

In spite of herself she smiled. " I rather think I can," she admitted. " Approximately at least."

" I think I understand ye, better than ye do me," he went on very slowly. " I think ye're plumb honest in all the notions ye fotched up here despite the fact that

most of 'em are wrong. Ye've done come with a heap of money, to teach folks what *you* 'low they'd ought to know. Ye didn't know that they'd ruther have ignorance than charity. Ye think that you an' Almighty God have gone in partners fer the regeneration of these mountains, where no woman has ever been insulted an' no man has to bar his door against thievery: where all we asks is to be left alone. I reckon every day ye're wonderin', 'Is my halo on straight?' It's nat'ral enough that ye should be right scornful of a man that some newspaper reporter has called a murderer."

His voice fell away and Juanita heard again the beating of the hammers out in the barn.

"Is that all?" she asked. But the man shook his head and stood looking down on her until under the spell of his unusual eyes, she felt like screaming out, "Talk if you want to, but for heaven's sake don't hypnotize me. It isn't fair!"

"Mebby ef ye'd stopped to think about things a little more deliberate," he thoughtfully resumed, "ye'd have seen that I didn't have no quarrel with your plans. Mebby I might even have been able to help ye. I could have told ye for one thing that whether the ways here be right or wrong, they've done stood fer two hundred years. Ye've got to go slow changin' 'em. Ye can't hardly pull up a poplar saplin' with one jerk. Thar's a tap root underneath it that runs down half way to hell.

"If people hyarbouts is distrustful of foreign teachers an' ways, it's because of the samples they've had. A feller came here once from the settlements to

teach school. He was a smart upstandin' feller an' well liked. A man by the name of Trevor.

"When folks found out that he was locatin' coal an' buyin' their land fer next to nothin'— robbin' them of their birthright — it looked right smart like somebody might kill him. I warned him away to save his life. Ye've got to make folks forget Trevor afore ye makes 'em trust *you*."

"Thank you," said Juanita coldly. "I'll try to show them that I'm not another Trevor. Are you warning me away to save my life, too?"

"I'm tol'able ignorant," went on the man, "but I've read a few books an' one of 'em told the story of the Trojan hoss. I wanted ter see what kind of a critter *you* was a-ridin' into these hills. I come to this cabin the night ye got here to find out."

"I thought so," she quietly answered. "I was to be inspected like an immigrant, and the Lord of the Land was to decide whether or not I should be sent back."

"Put it that way if ye've a mind to," he imperturbably answered. "Ye was comin' to be a school-teacher here. Well I'd done been a school-teacher here . . . I see your smile . . . ye're wonderin' what I could teach. Maybe after all it's a right good idea to teach A. B. C.'s, before ye starts in with algebra an' rhetoric. Ye wouldn't have me as a friend an' I reckon that won't break my heart."

"Then," said the girl, looking up and meeting his eyes with a flash of challenge, "I shall endeavor to get along without your favor. We could hardly have met on common ground, at best. I shall teach the Ten

Commandments, including: 'Thou shalt not kill.' I shall teach that to lie hidden behind a bush and shoot an unsuspecting enemy is cowardly and despicable. I would not be willing to tell them that they must live and die vassals to feudal tyranny."

"No," he agreed, "ye couldn't hardly outrage your holy conscience by tryin' to teach 'em things in a way they could understand, could ye? If Little Jeb had a-come to ye, like he came to me, askin' the name of the man he sought to kill, ye would have said ter him, 'It was So-an'-so, but ye mustn't harm him, because somebody writ in a book two thousand years ago that killin' is a sin.' An' the hell of it is ye'd 'low such talk would satisfy *him.* Ye couldn't do no such wicked thing as to stop an' reflect that he's a mountain boy, an' that for two hundred years the blood in his veins hes been a-comin' down to him full of grudge-nursin' an' hate. Ye couldn't make allowances for the fact that he wasn't hatched in a barn-yard to peck at corn-cobs an' berries, but in an eagle's nest — that he's a bird of prey. Ye couldn't consider the fact that the killin' instinct runs in the current of his blood, an' was drunk in at his mother's breast. Ye'd just teach barn-yard lessons to young eagles an' that's why ye might as well go home."

"I'm grateful for this teacher's course," retorted Juanita hotly, "and I'm not going home."

Then Anse Havey went on. "But I know that boy. I know that if I'd talked that-a-way he'd just about have gone out in the la'rel an' got somebody. It might not 'a' been the right feller, and he might have found that out later — when he couldn't undo his deed. I reckon ye never had a father murdered, did ye?"

"Hardly," answered the girl with a scornful toss of her head. "You see I wasn't reared among gun-fighters."

"Well, I have," responded the man with imperious steadiness. "I was in the Legislature down at Frankfort when it happened, a-helpin' to make the laws that govern this State. I was fer them laws in theory — but when that word came, I paired off with a Republican so's not to lose my vote on the floor of the House, an' I come back here to these hills an' got that feller. I reckon I ought to be ashamed to tell ye that, but I'm so plumb ign'rant that I can't feel it. I knew how Jeb felt, an' so I held him off with a promise to wait. Of course ye couldn't accept the help of a man like that . . ."

He turned and withdrew his hands from his pockets.

"I'm through," he added, "an' I'm obleeged to ye fer harkenin' to me."

Juanita rose and stood before him, and despite his bitter resentment of her scorn, he recognized in her a sort of courage he had never before seen in a woman; a courage of conviction and the crusader's deep purpose. And she was very beautiful and gallant as she stood there and shook her head.

"There is something in your point of view, Mr. Havey," she reluctantly acknowledged. "But it is all based on twisted and distorted principle.

"I don't think myself a saint. I guess I'm pretty weak. My first appeal to you was pure weakness. But I stand for ideas that the experience of the world has vindicated and for that reason I am going to win. That is why, although I'm a girl with none of your

physical power, and no gun-fighters at my back, you are secretly afraid of me. That is why you are making unfair war on me. I stand for the implacable force of civilization that must sooner or later sweep you away and utterly destroy your dominance."

For the first time Bad Anse Havey's face lost its impassiveness. His eyes clouded and became puzzled, surprised. "I reckon I don't hardly follow ye," he said. "If ye wants it to be enemies, all right, but I ain't never made no war on ye. I don't make war on women-folks, an' besides I wouldn't make a needless war nohow. All I've got to do is to give ye enough rope an' watch ye hang yourself."

"If you think that," she demanded with a quick upleaping of anger in her pupils, "why did you feel it necessary to prevent my buying land? Why do you coerce your vassals, under fear of death, to refuse my offers? Why, if my school means no menace, do you refuse it standing room to start its fight?"

The man's pose stiffened.

"Who told ye I'd hindered anybody from sellin' ye land?"

"Wherever I inquire it is the same thing. They must ask permission of Bad Anse Havey before they can do as they wish with their own."

"By God, that's another lie," he said shortly. "But I reckon ye believe that, too. I did advise folks hereabouts against sellin' to strangers, but that was afore ye come." He paced the length of the room a while then halted before her.

"Some of that property," he went on, and this time his voice was passionate in its earnestness, "has enough

coal an' timber on it to make its owners rich some day. Have ye seen any of the coal-minin' sections of these hills? Well, go an' have a look. Ye won't find any mountaineer richer fer the development. Ye'll find 'em plundered, an' cheated an' robbed of their homes by your civilized furriner. I've done aimed ter pertect my folks against bein' looted. I aims to go on pertectin' 'em."

"Ignorance won't protect them," she insisted.

Suddenly he demanded without preface. "How old are you?"

Her glance questioned his face and his direct eyes told her that there was no impertinence in the interrogation.

"I am twenty-two," she curtly replied.

"Twenty-two!" he repeated after her, she thought a little scornfully. "I'm just five years more than that, but I'm thirty years older than you in everything but years. I've seen enough of all this thing down here not to get wrought up about it. I've got enough lead right here in my own body now," he clapped one hand to his chest and went on with the same fixed expression and the same calculatedly calm voice, "to kill all the leaders of the McBriar crowd, if it were run back into bullet molds again. Every day's liable to be my last day. I've shook the hands of men thet was warm in the mornin' an' gripped mine in friendship, an' thet was cold an' lifeless at sun-down — like his'n." He jerked his head toward the bed and the sheeted form upon it. "Yes, an' I've tried to keep the scores tol'able even. I'm in a fix to lay by theories an' look facts in the face, I reckon. I don't hold out peace offerin's to men that

are seekin' to knife me. I fight the devil with fire an' I tries to make it hot."

"It hadn't occurred to me to doubt that," she commented as he paused.

"I told ye we was distrustful of foreigners," said Anse Havey. "Some day thar'll be a bigger war here than the Havey-McBriar war. Ye've seen somethin' of that. That other war will be with *your* people an' when it comes there won't be any McBriars or Haveys. We'll all be mountaineers standin' together an' holdin' what God gave us against them that seeks to plunder us. God knows I hate Milt McBriar an' his tribe — hate 'em with all the power of hatin' that's in me — an' I'm a mountain man. But Milt's people an' my people have one thing in common. We're mountain men an' these hills are our'n. We have the same killin' instinct when men seek to rob us. We want to be let alone, an' if we fight amongst ourselves it ain't nothin' to the way we'll fight, shoulder to shoulder an' back to back, against the robbers from Down-below."

The man paused again and as Juanita looked into his blazing eyes she shuddered for it seemed that the killing instinct of which he spoke was burning there. She thought of nothing to say and he went on.

"It's war between families now — but when *your* people come — come to buy for nothin' and fatten on our starvation we men of the mountains will forget that an' I reckon we'll fight together like all damnation against the rest. Thet's why I'm counselin' folks not to sell heedless."

"Then you did not forbid your people to sell to me?" inquired the girl.

"Why in hell should I make war on ye?" he suddenly inquired. "Does a man fight children? We don't fight the helpless up here in the hills."

"Possibly," she suggested with a trace of irony, "when you learn that I'm not so helpless you won't be so merciful."

"We'll wait till that time comes," said the man shortly. "Helpless! Why, the good Lord knows, ma'am, I pity ye. Can't ye see what odds ye're contendin' against? Can't ye see that ye're fightin' God's hills and sandstone an' winds an' thunder? Can't ye see ye're tryin' ter take out of men's veins the fire in their blood; the fire that's been burnin' there for two centuries? Ye're like a little child tryin' ter pull down a jail-house. Ye're singin' lullaby songs to the thunder. Yes, I feel right sorry fer ye, but I ain't a-fightin' ye."

"I'm doing none of those things," she protested with a defiant blaze in her eyes; "I'm only trying to show these people that their ignorance is not necessary, that it's only part of a scheme to keep them vassals. You talk about the wild, free spirit of the mountain men. I think that free men will listen to that argument."

Anse Havey laughed.

"Change 'em!" he repeated, disregarding the slur of her last speech. "Why, if ye don't give it up and go back to your birds that pick at berries, do you know what will happen to ye? I'll tell ye. Thar will be a change, but it won't be in us. It'll be in *you*. You'll be mountainized."

She stood and looked at him and her violet eyes were brimming with starry contempt. Her delicate chin

tilted disdainfully and her lips curled a little. It was such a look as some Cæsar's daughter, borne on the necks of slaves, might have cast down on a barbarian slave chained to his sweep in the galleys. So she regarded him for the galley slaves, too, had been criminals.

"Who will change me?" she inquired with a stinging scorn of voice. "You — and men like you?"

The clansman felt the lash of her disdain with all the sensitiveness of mountain pride, but he betrayed no recognition.

"Mebby it won't be me, nor yet men like me. But the air ye breathe; the life ye live; the water ye drink, all the things that God Almighty forges in places that's clost to his free sky; them things will do it.

"Ye can't live where the storms come from an' where the rivers are born an' not have their spirit get into your blood. Ye may think ye're in partners with God, but I reckon ye'll find the hills are bigger than *you* be. How much land do ye need?"

"Why?"

"Because, by God, I aim to see that ye get it. Ye say I'm scaired of ye. I aim to show ye how much I'm scaired. I aim to let ye go your own fool way, an' flounder in your own quicksand. An' if nobody won't sell ye what ye want, let me know an', by Almighty God, I'll make ye a free gift of a farm, an' I'll build your school myself. Thet's how much I'm scaired of ye. I've tried to be friends with ye an' ye won't have it. Now just go as fur as ye feel inclined an' see how much I mind ye." He turned abruptly on his heel and went out, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XV

THAT summer Juanita's cabin had risen on the small patch of ground bought from the Widow Everson, for in these hills the raising of a house is a simple thing which goes forward subject to no delays of striking workmen or balking contractors. The usual type with its single room may be reared in a few days by volunteers who turn their labor into a frolic. Neighbors lend a hand, and there are no bosses and no underlings, but each man is a monarch contributing his labor as an equal, and the smell of freshly sawed lumber goes up like incense in the air, while the simple craftsmen strive mightily in a good-humored rivalry of skill and brawn.

To Juanita's ears the sound of the hammers and the scream of the little portable saw-mill down in the valley had been a music in keeping with the languorous haze of the horizon and the spicy fragrance of the cider presses. She had owed much to Jerry Everson and to Good Anse Talbott, for, had her building force been solidly of Havey or McBriar complexion, the school would henceforth have stood branded, in native eyes, a feud institution.

But Good Anse and Jerry, who were tolerated by both factions, and were gifted with a rough-hewn diplomacy, had known upon whom to call, even while they had seemed to select at random. So a stanch little

house of squared logs had gone up in a place just above and to the right of the widow's, where the girl could see from her window the tall poplar on the crest. It had three rooms, and she had been gayer and blither while she supervised her volunteer helpers than at any other time since she had come to these hills.

Something of herself had gone into the fashioning which gave the place, in spite of the meager limitations of remoteness and isolation, a touch of art and character. She had designed and helped build a hearth of rough stone, which would not only warm, but decorate as well. She had seen to the thoroughness of the chinking, too, until one man who dwelt in a wind-riddled house of his own gravely shook his head and expressed fear that, "She war liable ter sulter an' sicken fer lack of fresh air." The windows he regarded with even greater suspicion as making a needless concession to one's enemies.

Juanita Holland had grown up largely with boys. Of late, since she had fancied herself disappointed beyond retrieving of heart, she had been asking herself often the question, "Why are boys so much manlier than men?" But these big, loosely-knit, leathern-sinewed creatures, bearded like prophets, were more boys than men after all and for them she felt a quick comradeship.

The cabin had been finished just before the news came of the death of Fletch McNash, and Jerry Everson had gone over with her to survey and admire it.

As he stood under the newly laid roof, sniffing the fresh woody fragrance of the green timbers he produced from under his coat what looked like a giant pow-

der horn. He had scraped and polished it until it shone like varnish and he hung it by its leather thong above the hearth.

"What is it for, Jerry?" demanded the girl; and he took it down again and set it to his lips and blew. A mellow sound, not loud, but far-carrying like the fox hunter's tallyho floated over the valley. "Our house hain't more'n a whoop an' a holler away," he said awkwardly, "but when ye're livin' over hyar by yoreself ef ye ever wants anything in ther night time jest blow thet horn." After she had almost burst her cheeks in her effort he added with a grin, "Don't never blow *this* signal onlesson ye wants ter raise merry hell." He imitated very low through pursed lips three long blasts and three short ones.

"What does that signify?" she demanded.

"Ye've done already heered ther McBriar yell," he reminded her. "Well them three longs an' three shorts is ther Havey rallyin' call. When thet goes out every Havey thet kin tote a gun's got ter git up an' come. Hit means war."

"Oh," exclaimed Juanita. Then she laughed and quoted low to herself,

> "Shame on the false Etruscan who lingers at his home,
> When Lars Porsena of Clusium is on the march for Rome."

In a minute she added, "Thank you, Jerry. I won't call the Haveys to battle."

The night after she had flung her challenge down to Bad Anse Havey, Juanita stayed at the McNash cabin, to be with Dawn and the widow. The next day she went with them to the mountain-side "buryin' ground"

where Good Anse performed the last rites for the dead.

The "jolt-wagon" which carried the unpainted box was drawn ploddingly by oxen, for the "buryin' ground" lay up a steep trail, and the funeral procession made its way in a laborious and straggling line. It was a strange cortège and mournful despite the bright calico of the women's dresses. As they rode, mountain-fashion, facing to the side and shaking their arms like wings, they would have made a picture grotesquely funny had it not been so grotesquely wretched and somber. The dusty purple of the iron-weed tops seemed to be waving plumes of ragged mourning, and in a patch of briars they came to the freshly dug grave, where the sun glinted on the men's rifle-barrels.

Juanita, looking around the circle, saw the still, apathetic face of the wife, and the tearful one of Little Dawn, and she wondered if her own features were as stolid as those others about her. Here where the ridges piled up with such a power of accumulated sullenness, all outward display of emotion seemed out of place. She watched the grim-set lips and tightly clenched hands of Jeb and Little Jesse as their eyes with one accord traveled toward the eastern ridges, where dwelt the authors of this death, and she shudderingly felt that this burial marked not an end, but a beginning. So she looked away from those faces, sickened by forebodings, though deeply in sympathy, too, and her eyes met, across the open grave, those of Bad Anse Havey.

It seemed to her that he must read their message. "For all this I challenge you," but his eyes did not shift nor alter.

Through it all; through the sing-song drone of Brother Talbott's "discourse"; through the whining falsetto of their hymn-singing, even through the thud of clod on casket, one impression seemed printing itself ineffaceably on her brain. It was an impression of guns.

With the scorched green behind them, with the red and blue calico and the hodden gray of their clothing, there was color enough, yet the most insistent note of the picture was the dull gleam of their rifles. The one scrupulously clean and modern note, too, was in the condition and pattern of their weapons.

Men might go unshaven and unwashed, but their arms were greased and polished and they came to the funeral under arms — for the history of to-day might repeat the history of yesterday.

After that was over, and after it had been decided that the widow was to take the younger children up Meeting House Fork to dwell with a brother, the missionary and the teacher started back. Jeb was to stay here alone to run the farm, and when Juanita returned to the ridge Dawn went with her.

Juanita had insisted on this. She could not bear to think of her little protégée losing herself in the uncouth environment of the "branch-water folks"; and she could not bear to think of losing the influence she had won over the child just at the transitory period of life where influences were so vital.

So when they turned back Dawn sat perched on a pillion behind Good Anse Talbott, and Jeb, watching his family separate in two directions, leaned a solitary figure on the stile and twisted his bare toes in the hot dust. He gazed staringly at the blistered woods,

and on his face sat murder in the making. The reflections that were to be his companions in solitude, were thoughts that would rankle and spur him to his sorry destiny.

Perhaps it was the misery in Juanita Holland's eyes that elicited from the missionary, after a long and silent ride, an abrupt question.

"Wall, ma'am, hev ye done got enough? Does ye still aim ter tarry in these parts?"

She looked up and besides the bewilderment and pain in her clouded pupils there was also the hurt as if of an accusation of cowardice. "Tarry!" she exclaimed, "of course. Why shouldn't I stay?"

"Wall," his weary eyes went gazing off up the slopes, "I reckon ye hain't hardly had a good time up hyar, an' hit's mighty liable ter git wuss. Ye see, ye've done made Anse Havey mad, an' hit looks right smart like ye're takin' a heap of pains fer nothin'."

"For nothing!" She wondered if it *were* for nothing. Others might "warn" her for purposes of intimidation; their gloomy prophecies might be inspired, but from the sad, world-weary lips of Brother Anse and the tired soul in his tired body would come no false message. "Do you believe it's for nothing, Brother Anse? Haven't you given your life to it? Has it all been vain? Do you regret it?"

Very slowly and wearily he shook his head. "No, but I was born amongst 'em an' God laid this work on me ter chasten me an' give me a chanst ter live down my iniquities. I didn't hev no choice an' yit sometimes —" He paused and added in a dead voice, "Sometimes hit seems mightily like I hain't accom-

plished nothin'. They listens ter me, but they goes right back an' sheds blood ergin. Hit's born in 'em an' when they dies they passes hit down ter their children."

"I hoped," she told him with gentle reproach, "that you at least could see some value in my efforts; that you sympathized with them."

The missionary looked into her face and his eyes burned with the fierce fire of prophecy.

"Little gal," he said vehemently, "hit looks ter me like ye're a plumb saint sent by Almighty God, but I kain't b'ar ter see yore heart broke. Hit's a young heart an' these mountings will shorely break hit. They're too big an' men like Anse an' Milt will stop ye. God knows I wants ter see ye stay, but God knows I counsels ye ter go."

"I'll stay," she said simply.

After that they rode in silence until Dawn from her pillion spoke for the first time. They were passing a tumbling waterfall, shrunken now to a trickling rill. On each side loomed huge sentinels of moss-covered rock.

"Onct when I war a leetle gal," she said, "Unc' Perry war a-hidin' out up thet branch from ther revenuers. I used ter fotch his victuals up thar ter him."

Juanita turned suddenly with a shocked expression. It was as if her little song-bird friend had suddenly and violently reverted; as if the flower had turned to poison weed. And as Juanita looked, Dawn's eyes were blazing and Dawn's face was as dark as her black hair; dark with the same expression which brooded on her brother's brow.

"What is it, dear?" Juanita asked; and in a tense and fiery voice the younger girl exclaimed:

"I wishes I war a man. I wouldn't wait and set still like Jeb's doin'. By God, I'd git thet murderer. I'd cut his heart outen his body."

"I tole ye," quietly mused Brother Anse, "thet ther instinct's in ther blood. Anse Havey went down ter Frankfort an' set in ther Legislater — but he come back ther same man thet went down. Somethin' called him. Somethin' calls ter every mountain man thet goes away, an' he hearkens ter ther call."

"Anse come back," repeated Dawn triumphantly. "An' Anse is hyar. Ef Jeb sets thar an' don't do nothin' I reckon Anse Havey won't hardly pass hit by without doin' nothin'. Thank God thar's some men left in ther hills like Anse Havey . . . but ef Jeb don't do nothin' and Anse don't do nothin' I'll do hit myself."

Again Juanita shuddered, but it was not the time for argument and so she went on, bitterly accusing Anse Havey in her heart for his wizard hold on these people; a hold which incited them to bloodshed as the fanatical priests of the desert urge on their wild tribesmen.

She did not know that Bad Anse Havey went every few days over to the desolated cabin and often persuaded the boy to ride home with him and spend a part of the time in his larger brick house. She did not know that Bad Anse was coming nearer to lying than he had ever before come, in withholding his strong suspicions from the boy because of his unwillingness to incite another tragedy. So when one day a McBriar henchman by the name of Luke Thixton had left the mountains and gone West, Anse hoped that this man

would stay away for a long while, and he refrained from mentioning to Jeb that now, when the bird had flown he knew definitely of his guilt. Proof positive had confirmed his deeply grounded suspicions too late and he had made no effort to intercept the refugee. Now he set himself methodically about the task of guarding the boy lest his suspicions should go baying on a false trail.

While Dawn, under the guidance of her preceptress, was making the acquaintance of a new and sweeter life whose influences fed her imagination and fired her quick ambition, her brother was more solemnly being molded by the Havey chief. He was drinking in, as Anse Havey read, the lives of the men of whom Plutarch wrote and of the laws of his own State which should arm him to safeguard his timber and coal against the depredations of the foreigner. Each teacher thought of the other as an irreconcilable foe, and each had at heart, without realizing it, the same object. Each was striving in honesty and earnestness, to protect and strengthen the same people.

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The water-mill of old Bob McGreeger was the nearest spot to the dwelling of Bad Anse Havey where grist could be ground to meal and sometimes when Jeb came over to the brick house he would volunteer to throw upon his shoulders the sack of corn and plod with it up across the ridges. He would sit there in the dusty old mill while the slow wheel groaned and creaked and the cumbersome mill-stones did their slow stint of work.

So one day toward the end of August, Juanita, who had climbed up the path to the poplar to look over

her battle-field and renew her vows, saw Jeb sturdily plodding his way in long resolute strides through the woods toward the mill, with a heavy sack upon his shoulders, and a rifle swinging at his side. His face was sullen as usual, with downcast eyes, but he did not see her, and she did not call to him as he passed on and out of sight in the sun-burned woods. That day chance had it that no one else had come to mill and Bob McGreeger had persuaded the boy to drink from the "leetle blue kag" until his mind was ripe for mischief. While the mill-stones slowly crushed out his meal Jeb McNash sat on a pile of rubbish in the gloomy shack, nursing his knees in interlocked fingers. Old Bob drank and stormed, and cursed the inertia of the present generation. The lad's lean fingers tautened and gripped themselves more tensely and his eyes began to smolder and blaze with a wicked light as he listened.

"Ye looks like a right stand-up sort of a boy, Jeb," growled the old fire-eater, who had set more than a few couples at each other's throats. "An' I reckon hit's all right, too, fer a feller ter 'bide his time, but hit 'pears ter me like ther men of these days don't do nothin' *but* bide thar time."

"I won't bide mine no longer then what I has ter," snapped the boy. "Anse 'lows ter tell me when he finds out who hit war thet got my pap. Thet's all I needs ter know."

Old Bob McGreeger shook his head knowingly and laughed in his tangled beard. "I reckon Anse Havey'll take his leisure. He's got other fish ter fry. He's a thinkin' 'bout bigger things than yore grievance, son."

The boy rose and his voice came very quietly and ominously from suddenly whitened lips. "What does ye mean by thet, Uncle Bob?"

"Mebby I don't mean nothin' much. Then ergin mebby I could give ye a pretty-good idee who kilt yore pap. Mebby I could tell ye 'bout a feller — a feller thet hain't fur removed from Old Milt hisself — thet went 'snoopin' acrost ther ridge ther same day yore pap died, with a rifle-gun crost his elbow, an' his pockets strutty with ca'tridges."

It was as if each word were a hot needle galling and irritating the obsession about which the lad's thoughts had been pivoting and pirouetting for weeks with nightmare grotesquerie.

The finger nails of his two hands bit into their palms and his brows drew themselves into a wrinkled mask of malevolence.

"Who war he?" came the tense demand with the sudden snap of rifle-fire. "Who war thet feller?"

Old Bob filled and lighted his pipe with fingers that had grown unsteady from the ministration of the "leetle blue kag." He laughed again in a satirical, drunken fashion.

"Ef Bad Anse Havey don't 'low ter tell ye, son," he artfully demurred, "I reckon hit wouldn't hardly be becomin' fer me ter name his name."

The boy picked up his battered hat. "Give me my grist," he said shortly. He stood by breathing heavily, but silently while the sack was being tied, then putting it down by the door, he wheeled and faced the older man.

"Now ye're a-goin' ter tell me what I needs ter

know," he said quietly, "or I'm a-goin' ter kill ye whar ye stands."

Uncle Bob laughed. He had meant all the while to impart that succulent bit of information, which was no information at all, but mischief-making suspicion. He had held off only to infuriate and envenom the boy with the cumulative force of climax.

"Hit warn't nobody but —" after a pause he went on —"but Old Milt McBriar's own son, young Milt."

"Thet's all," said Jeb soberly; "I'm obleeged ter ye."

He went out with the sack on his shoulder and the rifle under his arm, but when he had reached a place in the woods where a blind trail struck back, he deposited his sack carefully under a ledge of overhanging rock. The clouds were mounting and banking now in a threat of rain and since it was not his own meal he carried he must be doubly careful of its safety.

Then he crossed the ridge until he came to a point where the thicket grew down close and tangled to the road. He had seen young Milt going west along that road this morning and by nightfall he would be riding back. The gods of Chance were playing into his hands.

So he lay down, closely hugging the earth, and cocked his rifle. For hours he crouched there with unspeakable patience, while his muscles cramped and his feet and hands grew cold under the pelting of a rain which was strangely raw and chilling for the season. The sun sank in an angry bank of thunder heads and the west grew lurid. The drenching downpour blinded him and trickled down his spine under his clothes, but at

last he saw the figure he had expected, riding a horse which he knew. It was the same roan mare that Bad Anse had restored to Milt McBriar after that other day.

When young Milt rode slowly by, fifty yards away with his mount at a walk and his reins hanging he was untroubled by any anxiety because he was in his own territory and was at heart fearless. The older boy from Tribulation felt his temples throb and the rifle came slowly up, and the one eye which was not closed looked point-blank across immovable sights and along a steady barrel into the placid face of his intended victim. He could see the white of Milt's eye and the ragged lock of hair under the hat-brim which looked like a smudge of soot across his brow. Then slowly Jeb McNash shook his head. A spasm of battle went through him and shook him like a convulsion to the soles of his feet. He had but to crook his finger to appease his blood-lust — and break his pledge.

"I've done give Anse my hand ter bide my time 'twell I war dead sartain," he told himself. "I hain't *quite* dead sartain yit. I reckon I've got ter wait a spell."

He uncocked the rifle and the other boy rode on, but young Jeb folded his arms on the wet earth and buried his face in them and sobbed, and it was an hour later that he stumbled to his feet and went groggily back, drunk with bitterness and emotion toward the house of Anse Havey. Yet when he arrived after nightfall his tongue told nothing and his features revealed less.

CHAPTER XVI

JUANITA, living in the cabin she had built, with the girl who had become her companion and satellite; making frequent hard journeys to some house which the shadow of illness had invaded, found it hard to believe that this life had been hers only a few months. Suspense seemed to stretch weeks to years and she awoke each new day braced to hear the news of some fresh outbreak, and wondered why she did not hear it. A few neighborhood children were already learning their rudiments, and plans for more building were going forward.

Sometimes Jeb came over from the brick house to see his sister and on the boy's face was always a dark cloud of settled resolve. If Juanita never questioned him on the topic that she knew was nearest his heart it was because she realized that to do so would be the surest way to estrange his friendship and confidence.

In one thing she had gained a point. She had bought as much property as she would need, probably much more than she would need unless her dreams were fulfilled to a degree that lay beyond the probabilities.

Back somewhere behind the veil of mysteries Anse Havey had pressed a button or spoken a word and all the hindrance that had lain across her path straightway evaporated. Men had come to her, with no further solicitation on her part, and now it seemed that

many were animated by a desire to turn an honest penny by the sale of land. In every conveyance that was drawn — deeds of ninety-nine-year lease instead of sale — she read a thrifty and careful knowledge of land laws, and reservation of mineral and timber rights, which she traced to the head of the clan.

Anse Havey had seemed ready to abide by his proposal, for when she met him on the road one day, instead of riding by her with a curt, high-headed nod he drew rein and asked brusquely, "Got all the land ye need?"

She looked at him, statuesquely sitting his horse and raised her brows inquiringly. "Why?" she asked coolly.

"Because if ye ain't I stands ready to supply the balance."

"Thank you," she told him, partly because it gave her a feminine pleasure to bring that glitter of cold wrath to his eyes. "I only ask you to be just. I sha'n't tax your generosity."

"Suit yourself," was his short reply. "I'm ready to keep my word. It looks like a pity fer ye to sink so much money on a plant ye won't never have no call to use, but that's *your* business."

Her eyes flashed anger. "Is that a threat?" she inquired. "It doesn't frighten me. I shall use it enough to bring your system to ruins."

He laughed. "Go ahead," he said. "An' any time ye needs more rope call on me."

As summer spent itself there was opportunity for felling timber and the little saw-mill down in the valley sent up its drone and whine in proclamation that her

trees were being turned into squared timbers for her buildings. Often she would go down there and watch the pile grow and every log that went groaning against the teeth of the ripping disc, was, to her, a new block for her house of dreams.

When one or two solid buildings should stand there it would all seem more tangible. Now, because of the murmurs of warning which continued to come to her, she could not shake off the sense that she might on any morning awake to find her whole scheme a shattered vision. It concerned no man, whispered the vague, disquieting little voices of rumor, to prevent her building a plant if she chose to do so in the face of warning, but hands might fall blightingly and arrestingly on that plant when its operation was attempted.

Once when Milt McBriar rode up to the saw-mill he found the girl sitting there, her hands clasped on her knees, gazing dreamily across the sawdust and confusion of the place.

"Ye're right-smart interested in thet thar woodpile, hain't ye, ma'am?" he inquired with a slow benevolent smile. His kindliness of guise invited confidence and there was no one else within earshot, so the girl looked up with her eyes a little misty and her voice impulsive.

"Mr. McBriar," she said, "every one of those timbers means part of a dream to me, and with every one of them that is set in place will go a hope and a prayer."

He nodded sympathetically. "I reckon," he said, "ye kin do right-smart good, too."

"Mr. McBriar," she flashed at him in point-blank questioning, "since I came here I have tried to be of

use in a very simple and ineffective fashion. I have done what little I could for the sick and distressed, yet I am constantly being warned that I'm not to be allowed to carry on my work. Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't go ahead?"

He gazed at her for a moment quizzically, then shook his head.

"Oh, pshaw!" he exclaimed, "I wouldn't let no sich talk es thet fret me none. Folks hyarabouts hain't got much ter do except ter gossip round. Nobody hain't a-goin' ter hinder ye. We hain't such bad people, after all." After that she felt that from the McBriars she had gained official sanction, and her resentment against Anse Havey grew, because of his scornful ungraciousness.

The last weeks of that summer were weeks of drought and plague. Ordinarily in the hills storms brew swiftly and frequently and spend themselves in violent outpourings and cannonading of thunder, but that year the clouds seemed to have dried up, and down in the tablelands of the Bluegrass the crops were burned to worthless stalk and shrunken ear. Even up here in the birthplace of waters, the corn was brown and sapless so that when a breeze strayed over the hillside fields they sent up a thirsty, dying rasp of rattling whisper.

But it was not only in the famished forests and seared fields that the hot breath of the Plague breathed, carrying death in its fetid nostrils. Back in the cabins of the "branch-water folks" where little springs diminished and became polluted, all those who were not strong enough to throw off the touch of the specter's finger, sickened and died, and typhoid went impartially

in and out of Havey shack and McBriar cabin, whispering, "A pest on both your houses!"

The Widow McNash had not been herself since the death of Fletch. She, who had once been so strong over her drudgery, now sat day long on the doorstep of her brother's hovel and in the language of her people, "jest sickened an' pined away."

So, as Juanita Holland and Good Anse Talbott rode sweating mules about the hills, receiving calls for help faster than they could answer them, they were not astonished to hear that the widow was among the stricken. Though they fought for her life she refused to fight herself, and once again the Eastern girl stood with Dawn in the briar-choked "buryin' ground" and once more across an open grave she met the eyes of the men who stood for the old order. But now she had learned to set a lock on her lips and hold her counsel. So, when she met Anse and Jeb afterward, she asked without rancor, "May I take little Jesse back with me, too? He's too young," she added with just a heartsick trace of her old defiance, "to be useful to you, Mr. Havey, and I'd like to teach him what I can."

Anse and Jeb conferred and the elder man came back and nodded his head.

"Jesse can go back with ye," he said. "I'm still aimin' to give ye all the rope ye wants. When ye've had enough an' quits, let me know, an' I'll take care of Fletch's children."

Strangely enough the death of her mother did not seem to bring as much torture to the soul of the mountain girl as had that of her father. Often, indeed, she sat with a wide stare in her deep eyes and an agonized

twist on her petal-like lips, in the mute suffering of a stoic race. But Juanita saw that this hard form of sorrow was yielding, and that even in a few weeks the new and, to Dawn, wonderful phases of life here at the Holland cabin would rouse her out of herself. All unconsciously her silvery peals of laughter would ring out at each fresh challenge to her sense of humor and merriment. She spoke no more of vengeful thoughts and Juanita believed that she was once more the light-hearted song-bird, the depths of whose nature had not yet been truly stirred; a creature meant rather to smile to the sunshine than to moan to the storm winds.

And on *her* farm, as folks called Juanita's place, that September saw many changes. Near the original cabin was springing up a new structure, larger than any other house in that neighborhood, except possibly the strongholds of the chiefs, and as it grew and began to take form it loaned an air of ordered trimness to the countryside about it. It was fashioned in such style as should be in keeping with its surroundings and not give too emphatic a note of alien strangeness.

Because that was an easier form of building and the only form understood by these workmen, it was as square as a block-house erected in days of Indian warfare, and it was as solid. In the words of one of its builders, "it would stand thar jest like thet, barrin' fire an' ther wrath of God, 'twell Kingdom come." But it was a house of many windows and if its doors and shutters were as heavy as if they, too, had been built with a thought of standing a siege, that was because the frailer woodwork of the outer world could not be had. But the logs were solidly laid and their squared faces

were smooth inside and out. A broad, high veranda went around the house, and Juanita could look at the structure which was growing day by day to be less of a skeleton, and see in her mind's eye exactly what its finished appearance would be. She would picture the whole place, as the future was to know it, with the little hospital perched on the hill slope, and dormitories and workshops lying in an ordered hamlet about a trim campus. Dawn, to whom the growing of such unprecedented splendor was a world's wonder, shared her enthusiasm, and in her anticipation was a sparkle like wine. She used to walk around the sharp curve of the road which hid the place until you were almost upon it and "make-believe" that she was a stranger who had never traveled that road before. She would pretend to be amazed at the sight of a trim hillside with lines of colorful flowers, rows of hollyhock waving a welcome, and as the season advanced, brave lines of nodding marigolds and zinnias like soldiers of peace flaunting banners of welcome.

She and Juanita would stop and expatiate on the scene, which as yet had existence only in their imaginations.

"Wall, livin' land o' Mercy!" Dawn would exclaim with simulated astonishment. "Whoever seed the like of thet before in these hyar mountings! I've heered tell of flower gyardens down in the settle*mints* of old Kaintuck, but I nuver 'lowed ter see one hyarabouts." Then she would point to where there were to be buttresses of rough stone running here and there along the slopes green with transplanted ferns. These abutments were planned to give to tillers of the mountain-

sides an object lesson in the preservative value of terracing with which the gardeners of Switzerland and Madeira make fugitive garden spots and vineyards stand steadfast.

"An' would ye just take a peek at them thar rock fandangles," the mountain girl would go on with a twinkle in her blue eyes, mimicking the drawl which she herself was rapidly outgrowing. "I reckon ther feller thet built them thar things, aims ter make his durned farm stand hitched. Many's ther field thet's run off, from me, in a tide. Many's ther time I've hed ter prop up a hill of corn with a bowlder ter keep hit from a-sleddin' plumb down inter ther valley."

Juanita wished that her cabin could house more occupants, for the plague had left many motherless families and had there been accommodations, many children might have come into her fold. As it was she had several besides the McNashes as her nucleus and while the weather held good she was rushing her work of timber-felling and building which the winter would halt. Young Jesse at first retained his sullenness of mien, standing on his dignity in this woman-ruled place and refusing to participate in any work which he regarded as incompatible with his man's dignity.

He scowled with infinite contempt over their plans for what he called the "weed gyarden," but as the weeks went on he, too, became enthused and toiled sturdily and uncomplainingly. Jeb, on his visits, was slow of censure or praise, but his face did not lighten and the sparkle of coming autumn found no reflection in the moody eyes, wherein smoldered a growing bloodlust. The girl guessed that he reported progress to

Bad Anse Havey, and though she had never invited him and had lost no opportunity to affront him, she began to feel indignant at the clan chief's cool ignoring of her work. Heretofore men had come to her on her own terms. Here was one who could dismiss her from his scheme of things with no care or thought beyond a frank contempt and her woman's latent vanity was piqued.

. . . . . .

One day in early October young Milt McBriar happened upon Dawn and Juanita walking in the woods.

The gallant colors and the smoky mists of autumn wrapped the forests and brooded in the sky. An elixir went into the blood with each deep-drawn breath and set to stirring forgotten or hitherto unawakened emotions. Effervescence tingled in the air and glory reigned over the woods, where every tree became a torch and every night an artist painting in the dark from a palette of increasing gorgeousness.

There was the fulness and gayety of a great festival between the horizons, which seemed to communicate itself even to the geese as they waddled pompously up from the creek to banquet at leaky corn-cribs. On the slopes where the first frost had brought down showers of persimmons and walnuts and hickory nuts lay spread, was all the tapestried wonder of a carnival. The sugar trees flamed in scarlet. The oaks and hickories and poplars were garbed in russet and burgundy and yellow. Only the pines did not go mad with the festival spirit, but remained stoically somber. And in this heady atmosphere of quickened pulses, the McBriar boy halted and gazed at the Havey girl.

Juanita saw the mountain boy's eyes flash with an awakened spirit. She saw a look in his face which she was woman enough to interpret even before he himself dreamed what its meaning might be. The silent gaze of the youth who would some day be chief over the McBriars followed the lissome movements of the girl whose father the McBriars had done to death; followed them mutely and steadfastly, and into his pupils came something softer than any light that had burned there before; softer and hungrier.

Dawn was standing with her head up and her lids half-closed, looking across the valley to the Indian summer haze that slept in smoky purple on the ridges. She wore a dress of red calico and she had thrust in her belt a few crimson leaves from a gum tree and a few yellow ones from a poplar. In her black hair were more of them — from a scarlet sugar tree — and as she felt the eyes of the boy on her face, and realized how she was bedecked, her cheeks, too, kindled into a carmine flush so that she stood there a tremendously vivid little incarnation of barbaric beauty. Juanita Holland did not marvel at the fascinated, almost rapt look that came into young Milt's eyes, and Young Milt, too, as he stood there in the autumn woods was himself no mean figure. His lean body was quick of movement and strong, and his bronzed face bore the straight-looking eyes that carried an assurance of fearless honesty. Juanita remembered that his father's eyes also wore that seeming and that behind them lay a world of chicane and evil. But the boy had at least all the outward guise of a cleaner and better replica of his sire. He had been away to Lexington to college

and was going back. The keen intelligence of his face was marred by no note of meanness, and now as he looked at the girl of the enemy, his shoulders came unconsciously back with something of the pride that shows in men of wild blood, when they feel in their veins the strain of chieftains.

But Dawn after her first blush dropped her lids a little and tilted her chin, and without a word snubbed him with the air of a Havey looking down on a McBriar.

Milt met that gaze with a steady one of his own and banteringly said, "Dawn, kinder 'pears like ye mout 'a' got tangled up with a rainbow."

Her voice was cool as she retorted, "I reckon that's better then gittin' mixed up with some other things."

"I was jest a-thinkin' es I looked at ye," went on the boy gravely, "thet hit's better than gittin' mixed up with *any* other thing."

Dawn turned away and went stalking along the woodland path without a backward glance and Milt followed at her heels, with Juanita, much amused, bringing up the rear. Juanita thought that these two young folk made a splendid pair, specimens of the best of the mountains, as yet unbroken by heavy harness. Then as the younger girl passed under a swinging rope of wild grape vine, stooping low, a tendril caught in her hair and became tangled there.

Without a word young Milt bent forward and was freeing it, tingling through all his pulses as his fingers touched the heavy black mass, but as soon as she was free the girl sprang away and wheeled with her eyes blazing.

"How dast ye tech me?" she demanded, panting with wrath. "How dast ye?"

The boy laughed easily. "I dast do anything I wants," he told her. For a moment they stood looking at each other, then the girl dropped her eyes, but the anger had died out of them and Juanita saw that despite her condescending air, she was not displeased.

Juanita of course knew nothing of the suspicion which had led Jeb into the laurel on that summer afternoon, but even without that information when young Milt met them, more often than could be attributed to chance, on their walks and fell into the habit of strolling back with them, strong forebodings began to trouble her.

And one morning these forebodings were verified in crisis, for, while the youthful McBriar lounged near the porch of Juanita's cabin talking with Dawn, another shadow fell across the sunlight; the shadow of Jeb McNash. He had come silently and it was only as young Milt, whose back had been turned, shifted his position that the two boys recognized each other.

Juanita saw the start with which Jeb's figure stiffened and grew taut. She saw his hands clench themselves and his face turn as white as chalk; saw his chest rise and fall under heavy breathing that hissed through clenched teeth, and her own heart pounded with wild anxiety. But Milt McBriar's face showed nothing. His father's mask-like calmness of feature had come down to him, and as he read the meaning of the other boy's attitude, he merely nodded and said casually, "Howdy, Jeb."

Jeb did not answer. He could not answer. He was

straining and punishing every nerve fiber cruelly, simply in standing where he was and keeping his hands at his sides. For a time he remained stiff and white, breathing spasmodically, then without a word he turned and stalked away.

That noon a horseman brought a note across the ridge and as Juanita Holland read it she felt that all her dreams were crumbling and that the soul of them was paralyzed.

It was a brief note written in a copy-book hand.

"I'll have to ask you," it ran, "to send the McNash children over to my house. Jeb doesn't want them to be consorting with the McBriars, and I can't blame him. He is the head of his family.

"Respectfully,

"Anse Havey."

CHAPTER XVII

A STRONGER thing to Juanita Holland than the personal disappointment which had driven her to this work was now her eager, fiery interest in the undertaking itself. In these months she had disabused herself of many prejudices that had at first blinded her. There remained that lingering one against the man with whom she had not made friends.

The thing she had set out to do was an hundredfold more vital now than it had been when it stood for carrying out a dead grandfather's wish. She had been with these people in childbirth and death, in sickness and want; she had seen summer go from its tender beginnings to a vagabond end with its tattered banners of ripened corn. Autumn had blazed and flared into high carnival.

Close to the heart of this woman lay a worship of the chivalric, not in its forms and panoplies, but in its essence — in its scorn of the mean and untruthful; its passion of simple service; in its consecration to fighting for the weak.

All those deep qualities were intimately wound up and tangled with the life and work she had undertaken. The laurel had clasped its root tendrils about her being, and to fail would surely break her heart.

She must conquer, she told herself, and unconsciously her thought even fell into the simple tensity of the

people about her and she stood murmuring to herself, "Oh, God, I've just got to win — I've just got to win!"

But as young Jeb had turned on his heel and stalked away, even before the coming of the note she knew what would happen, and what would happen not only in this instance, but in others like it. This would not be just losing Dawn, bad as that was. It would be paralysis and death to the school; it would mean the losing for all time of every Havey boy and girl.

So she stood there and afterward said quietly, "Milt, I guess you'd better go," and Milt had gone gravely and unquestioningly, but with that in his eye which did not argue brightly for restoration of peace between his house and that of his enemy.

When the two girls had gone together into the cabin Dawn stood with a face that blanched as she began to realize what it all meant, then slowly she stiffened and her hands, too, clenched and her eyes kindled.

For a while neither of them spoke. Until Jeb's appearance young Milt had simply been himself to Dawn, now as she looked back it was as if she reviewed the situation with her brother's eyes. She had been permitting a McBriar to walk in the woods with her and she had even smiled on him. Not only was it a McBriar, but with one exception the most responsible and typical of all the McBriars. Into her heart crept something of deep shame. She felt like a nun who has been recreant to all her vows and traditions. It seemed to her that her dead father's spirit was rebuking her and her dead mother scorning her. She would not let Milt speak to her again. She would not wipe her feet

on young Milt should he throw himself on the earth before her.

But deep and uncompromising as the clan loyalty was in her blood, another loyalty now stood above it. She was a Havey, but not even Haveys should tear her away from Juanita Holland, the woman she loved and deified.

She came across to the chair into which the older girl had dropped listlessly and, falling to her knees, seized both Juanita's hands. She seized them tightly and fiercely and her eyes were blazing and her voice broke from her lips in turgid vehemence. For them both the cheery note died out of the din of hammer and saw and the loud voices of the "house-raisers."

The triumph departed from the enspiriting sight of ox-teams snaking logs down the mountain-side. The whole dream picture faded. Like some mighty walking delegate, Anse Havey would speak the word and that activity would become useless. He would call a strike and those buildings would stand doomed to perpetual emptiness. After all, Juanita reflected, she was totally helpless.

"I hain't a-goin' ter leave ye," cried Dawn. "I hain't a-goin' ter do it." No word had been spoken of her leaving, but in this life they both knew that certain things bring certain results, and they were expecting a note from Bad Anse. "I hope not, dear," murmured Juanita without conviction.

Then the mountain girl sprang up and became transformed. With her rigid figure and blazing eyes she seemed a torch burning with all the pent-up heritage of her past.

"I tells ye I hain't a-goin' ter leave ye!" she protested, and her utterance swelled to fiery determination. "Es fer Milt McBriar I wouldn't spit on him. . . . I hates him. I hates his murderin' breed. . . . I hates 'em like —" she paused a moment then finished tumultuously —"like all hell. I reckon I'm es good a Havey as Jeb. I hain't seen Jeb do nothin' yit."

Again she paused, panting with passionate rage. Then swept on while Juanita looked at her sudden metamorphosis into a Fury and shuddered.

"When I wasn't nothin' but a baby I fotched victuals ter my kinfolks a-hidin' out from revenuers. I passed right through men thet war a-trailin' 'em. I've done served my kinfolks afore an' I'd do hit ergin, but I reckon I hain't a-goin' ter let 'em take me away from ye."

But Juanita was thinking through her daze of grief and fear for the future, that in more ways than one she had failed. This child who had seemed so different from the blood-thirsty people about her was after all cut to the same ungoverned pattern.

She was as wild as the wildest of them. At the first note of provocation every vestige of the applied civilization had dropped from her like a discarded cloak. And now the young girl was standing there teaching the older girl the immutability of the hills.

"Ye're a-goin' ter have trouble es long es ye stays hyar," Dawn said vehemently. "Thar hain't nothin' but trouble hyarabouts. I've seed it since I was born. Anse Havey went down below ter ther settlemints an' trouble called him home. Ye seed what happened the night ye come. Ye knows what's happened since. Hit

won't niver end twell ther last McBriar's done been kilt. . . . But ef ye stays hyar I 'lows ter stay with ye."

She halted in her tirade and Juanita's voice came very low with a question.

"And if Anse Havey sends for you, dear: what then?"

The girl stood trembling and white for a moment and then her rage turned into a torrent of tears. She flung herself down on her knees again and buried her face in the other girl's lap; her defiance all converted to pleading. That question was like asking a subject whether he would defy an Emperor's edict.

"Don't let 'em take me," moaned the girl. "Don't let 'em. Hit's ther first time I've ever been happy. Don't let 'em."

Juanita could think of only one step to take, so she sent Jerry Everson for Brother Talbott, whom she had seen riding toward the shack hamlet in the valley.

"Thar hain't but one thing thet ye kin do," said Good Anse slowly when he and Juanita sat alone over the problem with the note of Havey command lying between them. "An' I hain't noways sartain thet hit'll come ter nothin'. Ye've got ter go over thar an' have speech with Anse Havey."

She drew back with a start of distaste and repulsion. Yet she had known that all along. She knew that to let the children who had come to her go back to the old life for which she had unfitted them, with their ambitions aroused to unsatisfied hunger would kill her. Moreover it would break their hearts. It would be the end of everything. For them she would even humble her-

self before Bad Anse Havey, but it is doubtful if Judith consented more reluctantly to go to the tent of Holofernes than she to go to the brick house against which she had launched so many anathemas.

"Ye see," she heard the missionary saying, "thar's jest one way Anse kin handle Jeb an' nobody else kain't handle him at all; not thet I blames ther boy much. He thinks he's right. I reckon ef ye kin persuade Anse ter reason with him ye'll hev ter promise that young Milt hain't a-goin' ter hang round hyar."

"I'd promise that," she said eagerly, "I'd promise almost anything. I can't give them up — I can't — I can't."

"Ef Anse didn't pertect little Dawn from ther McBriars, Jeb would ter a God's sartainty kill young Milt," went on the preacher, and the girl nodded miserably.

"I don't 'low ter blame ye none," he said slowly, almost apologetically, "but I've got ter say hit. Hit's a pity ye've seen fit ter say so many bitter things ter Anse. Mountain folks air mighty easy hurt in their pride an' no one hain't nuver dared ter cross him afore."

"No," she exclaimed bitterly, "he will welcome the chance to humiliate and to refuse me. He has been waiting for this; to see me come to him a suppliant on bended knee, and then to laugh at me and turn me away." She paused and added brokenly, "And yet I've got to go to him in surrender and pleading — to be refused — but I'll go."

"Listen," said the preacher, and his words carried that soft quality of pacification which she had once or twice heard before. "Thar's a-heap-worse fellers than

Bad Anse Havey. Ef ye could jest hev seed yore way ter treat him a leetle diff'rent —"

"How could I?" demanded Juanita hotly. "How could I be friends with a murderer and keep my self-respect?"

The brown-faced man looked up at her and spoke simply. "I've done kept mine," he said.

The girl rose.

"Will you go with me?" she asked a little weakly. "I don't feel quite strong enough to go over there alone. While they are humbling me I would like to have a friend at hand. I think it would help a little."

"I'm ready right now," said the missionary and so with the man who had guided her on other missions, she set out to make what terms she could with the enemy she had so stubbornly defied.

It seemed an interminable journey, though they took the short cut of the foot trail over the hills. It was a brilliant afternoon, full of music and sparkle and color, but for her the life had gone out of Nature's pageantry.

Under the poplar, where she had so often stood to look down defiantly on the brick house far below, Juanita paused, and grew a little faint. She put out one hand and steadied herself against the cool bark of its giant bole. In a faint self-contemptuous voice she quoted once more, but in an altered and shaken spirit.

> "The very leaves seemed to sing on the trees;
> The castle alone in the landscape lay
> Like an outpost of winter dull and gray;"

. . . . . .

The house that had come down to Anse Havey had been built almost a century before. It was originally placed in a tract so large that elsewhere it would have been a domain, a tract held under the original Virginia grant. Since those days much of it had been parceled out as marriage portions to younger generations. The first Havey had been a gentleman, whose fathers had been associates of Lord Baltimore, and who had fought with Washington for independence. It had taken the stalwart strain several generations to relapse into the ruck of semi-illiteracy.

The house itself was a relic of days before the richer traditions of Virginia had faded. It had been put there when such places were wilderness outposts of the culture left behind. In the attic still stood a dust-covered raw-hide trunk that had lumbered west with the early wagon trains of pioneer venturing, and in that trunk moldered such needless things as bits of colonial silver and brocaded petticoats and breeches with silver knee buckles. Then gradually, as the uprooted tree falls into dry rot, the gallant and scholarly stock had sunk and on it fed the slow waste of decay; just as the moth and the mildew fed on the brocades and satins.

The bricks for these walls had been baked in a home-made kiln, and the walls themselves had been reared like those of a fortress. There was a porch at the front and two floors, but the narrow windows were shuttered as heavily as those of a frontier prison and when its doors were barred the enemy who sought to enter must knock with a battering ram, and sustain a welcome from loop-holes.

Cabins that had once housed slaves, barns, a smoke-

house, an ice-house and a small hamlet of dependent shacks, clustered about a clearing which had been put there rather to avoid surprise than to give space for gardening. The Havey of two generations ago had been something of a hermit scholar and in his son had lurked a diminishing passion for books and an increasing passion for leadership.

The feud had blazed to its fiercest heat in his day, and the father of Bad Anse Havey had been the first Bad Anse. His son had succeeded to the title as a right of heritage, and had been trained to wear it like a fighting man. Though he might be a whelp of the wolf breed, the boy was a strong whelp and one in whom slept latent possibilities and anomalous qualities, for in him broke out afresh the love of books. It might have surprised his newspaper biographers to know how deeply he had conned the few volumes on the rotting shelves of the brick house, or how deeply he had thought along some lines. It might have amazed them had they heard the fire and resonance with which he quoted the wise counsel of the foolish Polonius. "Beware of entering a quarrel, but being in, so bear thee that the opposéd may beware of thee." As to entering a quarrel it sufficed his logic that he had been born into it, that he had "heired" his hatreds.

And because in these parts his father had held almost dictatorial powers, it had pleased him to send his son, just come to his majority, down to the State Capital as a member of the Legislature, and the son had gone to sit for a while among law-makers.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN other years Bad Anse Havey remembered days in that house when the voices of women and children had been raised in song and laughter. Then the family had gathered in the long winter evenings before the roaring back logs, and spinning wheel and quilting frame had not yet gone to the cobwebs of the cock-loft. But that was long ago.

The quarter century over which his memory traveled had brought changes even to the hills. The impalpable ghost of decay moves slowly with no sound save the occasional click of a sagging door here and the snap of a cord there, but in twenty-five years it moves — and an inbred generation comes to impaired manhood. Since Bad Anse himself had returned from Frankfort his house had been tenanted only by men and an atmosphere of grimness hung in its shadows. A half-dozen unkempt and loutish kinsmen dwelt there with him, tilling the ground and ready to bear arms. More than once they had been needed. It was to this place that Juanita Holland and the preacher were making their way on that October afternoon. Through the trees and undergrowth as they came nearer the girl could see that the faded grass had grown ragged and weed-choked in the yard, and that the fruit trees about it were gnarled and neglected, and the bee-gums leaned askew. All softening touches of comfort and ease had

gone to wrack, and the impression was that of a place where war sat enthroned above the ruins of thrift.

At a point where they should go down to the road and make their way around to the front the girl halted and stood resting, a little palpitant with the prospect of eating humble pie and more than a little frightened at the probability of failure. The missionary shook his head as he rested on a fallen log and contemplated her expression. There was beauty and pride and gallantry in her pose; lissom grace to ensnare a lover; charm to captivate an observer, but little of that humility which befitted one who came, stripped of power, to sue for terms. Defiance still shone too rebelliously from her eyes.

At the gate they encountered a solitary figure gazing stolidly out to the front and when their coming roused it out of its gloomy revery it turned and presented the scowling face of Jeb McNash.

"Where air they?" he demanded wrathfully, wheeling upon the two arrivals, and then he repeated violently, "By God, where air they? Why hain't ye done fotched Dawn an' Jesse?"

"Jeb," said the missionary quietly, "we done come over hyar fust ter hev speech with Anse Havey. Whar's he at?"

"I reckon he's in his house, but ye hain't answered my question. I'm ther one for ye ter talk ter fust. Hit's *my* sister ye've done been sufferin' ter consort with murderers, an' hit's me ye've got ter reckon with."

Brother Talbott only nodded. "Son," he gently reassured, "we aims ter talk with *you*, too, but I reckon

ye hain't got no call ter hinder us from havin' speech with Anse fust."

For a moment Jeb stood dubious, then he jerked his head toward the house. "Go on in thar, ef ye sees fit. I hain't got no license ter stop ye," he said curtly, "but I don't aim ter let ye leave 'thout seein' me, too."

Several shaggy retainers were lounging on the front porch, but as Good Anse Talbott and Juanita turned in at the gate, these henchmen disappeared inside. They would all be there to witness her humbling, thought the girl. It would please him to receive her with his jackal pack yelping their sycophant derision about him. Then she saw another figure emerge from the dark door to stand at the threshold and the flush in her cheeks grew deeper. Bad Anse Havey stood and waited and when they reached the steps of the porch he came slowly forward and said gravely, "Come inside." He led the way and they followed in silence.

Juanita found herself in the largest room she had yet seen in the mountains; a room which was dark at its corners despite a shaft of sun that slanted through a window, falling on a heavy table in a single band of light. On the table lay a litter of pipes, loose tobacco, cartridges and several books. Down the stripe of sunlight the dust motes floated in pulverized gold and the radiance fell upon a volume which lay open, throwing it into relief, so that as the girl stood uncertainly near the table she read at the top of a page the caption, "Plutarch's Lives."

But she caught her breath in relief for the retainers had disappeared.

Her first impression was that of a place massively and crudely timbered, where even the sun attacked the murk feebly. She had always thought of this house as the castle of the enemy and now that she had entered it the impression seemed rather strengthened than lessened, but it was a mediæval castle, crude and smoke-stained. It was the home of intrenched darkness.

Many of the details of the room bore the atmosphere of other days. The stag horns over the mantle shelf were trophies of long ago, and the long-barreled percussion-cap gun which hung across their prongs with its powder-horn and shot-pouch belonged to a past era. The aged hound that rose stiffly from the floor to growl and lie down again with much awkward circling looked as though he had been dreaming of trails through other decades.

Bad Anse Havey stood just at the edge of the sun shaft, with one side of his face lighted and the other dark.

But, if to the girl the whole picture was one of somber composition and color, it presented a different aspect to Bad Anse himself, as the young mountaineer stood facing the door. Juanita Holland was also at the edge of the sun shaft and the golden motes danced around the escaping curls of her brown hair and seemed to caress the delicate color of her flushed cheeks, kissing her lips into carmine, and intensifying the violet of her eyes. Her slender figure stood very straight in the blue gingham gown, and her sunbonnet had fallen back and hung by its loosely knotted strings.

And at her side stood the bent figure of the missionary, neutral and drab as though painted into the pic-

ture with a few strong strokes of a brush that had been dipped in only one color and that color dust brown. When he spoke his voice, by some fusing of elements, seemed in keeping with the rest of him: colorless.

"We've done come ter hev speech with ye, Anse," he began. "I reckon ye know what hit's erbout."

The Havey leader only nodded and his steady eyes and straight mouth line did not alter their sternness of expression.

He saw the stifled little gasp with which the girl read the ultimatum of his set face and the sudden mist of tears which in spite of herself blurred her eyes. He pushed forward a chair and gravely inquired: "Hadn't ye better set down, ma'am?"

She shook her head and raised one hand, which trembled a little, to brush the hair out of her eyes.

Palpably she was trying to speak, and could not for the moment command her voice. But at last she got herself under command and her words came slowly and carefully.

"Mr. Havey, I have very little reason to expect consideration from you. Even now if it were a question of pleading for myself I would die first, but it isn't that." She paused and shook her head. "You told me that I must fail unless I came to you. . . . Well, I've come — I've come to humiliate myself. I guess I've come to surrender."

His face did not change and he did not answer. Evidently, thought the girl bitterly, she had not sufficiently abased herself. After a moment she went on in a very tired, yet a very eager voice.

"You are a man of action, Mr. Havey. I make my

appeal to your manhood. I suppose you've never had a dream that has come to mean anything to you . . . but that's the sort of dream I've had. That little girl, Dawn, wants a chance. Her little brother wants a chance. I've humbled myself to come and plead for them. If you take them away from me now you will smash my school. I don't underestimate your power *now*. Children are just beginning to come to me and if you order these to leave the others will leave, too, and they won't come back. It will kill my school. If that's your purpose I guess it's no use even to plead. I know you can do it — and yet you told me you weren't making war on me."

"I reckon," interrupted Brother Talbott slowly, "ye needn't have no fear of that, ma'am. Anse wouldn't do thet."

"But if you aren't doing that," went on Juanita, "I want to make my plea just for the sakes of these children of your own people. I'm ready to accept your terms. . . . I'm ready to abase and humble my own pride, only for God's sake give *them* a chance to grow clean and straight and break the shackles of illiteracy and savagery."

She waited for the man to speak, but he neither spoke nor changed expression, so with an effort she went on, unconsciously bending a little forward in her eagerness.

"If you could see the way Dawn has unfolded like a flower, the thirsty intelligence with which she has drunk up what I have taught her; the way it has opened new worlds to her, I don't think you could be willing to plunge her back into drudgery and ignorance. She

is a woman, or soon will be, Mr. Havey. You don't need women in your feuds."

Again came the cautioning voice of the preacher in his effort to keep her away from antagonizing lines.

"They hain't been called away fer no reason like thet, ma'am." But Juanita continued, ignoring the warning.

"The other boy is too young for you to use yet. Let him at least choose for himself. Let him reach the age when he shall have enough knowledge of both sides to take his own course fairly. I'm not asking odds. You have Jeb and he wears your trademark in his face. The bitterness that lurks there shows that he is wholly your vassal; yours and the feud's. Doesn't that satisfy you? Won't you let the others stay with me?"

She broke off and her voice carried something like a gasp. Anse Havey's face stiffened.

Even now he did not speak to her, but turned toward the missionary.

"Brother Talbott," he said slowly, "would ye mind waitin' out there on the porch a little spell? I'd like to talk with this lady by myself."

As the missionary turned with his heavy tread it seemed to the girl that her last ally was leaving her and that she was being abandoned to the quiet and cruel will of her stronger enemy. She wheeled and clutched at the frayed, drab cloth of the preacher's coat-sleeve.

"No! No!" she exclaimed nervously. "Don't leave me. Let me have one friend."

The brown man took both her hands in his and looked reassuringly into her eyes.

"Ef I thought thet thar was any danger of ye havin'

ter listen at anything ye wouldn't want ter hear, little gal," he said quietly, "I reckon nuther Anse Havey ner all his people could make me leave this room. But hit's all right. I knows Anse Havey an' hit's better thet jest ther two of ye talks this thing over." Then as she dropped her hands at her sides, bitterly ashamed of her moment of weakness, he went out and closed the door behind him. When he was gone there was a short silence which Havey finally broke with a question.

"Why didn't ye say all these things to Jeb? I sent the letter on his say-so."

"But you sent it — and all the Havey power is in your hands. Jeb wouldn't understand such a plea. I come to the fountain head. My school is not a Havey school nor a McBriar school. It is meant to open its doors to both sides of the ridge, regardless of factions."

"Did young Milt come there ter git eddication? I thought he went to college down below." The question carried an undernote of irony.

Juanita shook her head.

"No," she answered. "He came there as any other passer-by might have come and he hasn't come often. Let me keep the children and he sha'n't come again."

For a time he stood there, regarding her with a steady and piercing gaze, while his brows drew together in a frown rather of deep thoughtfulness than of displeasure. She sank into a chair and her eyes turned from his disconcerting gaze and wandered about the room.

She had been in many mountain houses now and had become accustomed to the half light within their walls. She knew that these interiors were at first vague and grew in detail as the eyes fitted themselves, this thing

and that stealing slowly and, as it seemed, covertly, out of the shadows. Now her eyes fell upon something that seemed strangely out of place here and her gaze rested on it with a strange fascination.

It was an ancient portrait in a broken frame. Through its darkened and cracked paint there stood out the figure and face of a man of magnificent bearing, dressed in the blue and buff uniform of a Continental officer. There was nobility of brow and heroic resoluteness of eye, but around the lips lurked the gentle spirit of the chivalrous gentleman. Whoever had posed for that picture might have been a worthy type of the men who built the republic, and the hand that rested on the sword hilt was the slender hand of an aristocrat.

Her eyes traveled back to the other man, the feud leader of the mountains, and it was as if she were seeing new things in his face, too. Its features were cast in the same mold as those that looked out from the frame. There was the same brow and chin and carriage of the head; but the mouth was more set and stern. The gentle pride had turned to arrogance. Still, thought the girl, the same blood must flow in the veins of Bad Anse Havey as had flowed in those of the gentleman whose likeness the artist had set on canvas. He was after all only changed by the generations that had fought a bitterer battle for life. Could she appeal to the latent chivalry that must sleep somewhere in his heart?

Good God! thought Juanita Holland, suppose this man's blood had been going up instead of down from that start. Suppose that instead of relapse his lot had

been to march with the vanguard! What a splendid creature he might have been!

So fascinatedly did the canvas hold her attention that she heard his words as though coming from somewhere outside.

"I asked Brother Talbott to go out. . . ." he was saying, "because I didn't hardly want to hurt your feelin's by sayin' before him that your school can't last. You're goin' about it all the wrong way, an' it's worse to go about a good thing the wrong way than to go about a bad thing the right way. I told ye once that ye couldn't change the hills, an' that ye'd change first yourself. I say that again. Ye can't take fire out of blood with books. But if ye've done persuaded Brother Anse that you're doin' good, I didn't want him to hear me belittle ye."

The girl did not answer and the man followed her eyes to the portrait.

"Ye ain't hearkenin' to nothin' I says," he told her. "Shall I begin over an' say it again?"

"No," she stammered, "I heard you — only that picture is rather wonderful. I was looking at it."

He laughed shortly.

"That's the Revolutionary Havey," he enlightened. "I reckon we've run right smart to seed since his time. That old man died in his bed with his family round him. I reckon he didn't hardly have an enemy in the world. His name was Anse, too, but it wasn't Bad Anse. It was after that that the Haveys quit dyin' peaceful. There ain't been many lately that's done it. His grandson started the feud an' he passed it down to the rest of us. We grows to manhood an' gets our legacy of war.

That's the thing ye aims to change in a few weeks. It seems to me ye've bit off more than ye can chew."

Anse Havey went to the window where he drank deeply of the spiced air. Then he began to speak and this time it was in a voice the girl had never before heard, a voice that held the fire of the natural orator and that was colorful with emotion.

"The first time ye saw me, ye made up your mind what character of man I was. Ye made it up from hearsay evidence, and ye ain't never give me no chance to show ye whether ye was right or wrong. Ye say I've never dreamed a dream. Good God, ma'am, I've never had no true companionship except my dreams. When I was a little barefoot shaver I used ter sit there by that chimley an' dream dreams an' one of 'em's the biggest thing in my life to-day. There were men around Frankfort when I was in the Legislature that 'lowed I might go to Congress if I wanted to. I didn't try. My dream meant more to me than Congress — an' my dream was my own people: to stay here and help 'em."

He stepped over to the table and, with a swift and passionate gesture, caught up two books. "These are my best friends," he said and she read on the covers, "Plutarch's Lives," and "Tragedies of William Shakespeare." The girl looked up with amazement in her eyes, but she met in his own pupils a fire and eagerness which silenced her. She could not tell whether she was being wrought upon by the strange fire that dwelt in his eyes or the colorfulness of his voice, or the influence of something beyond himself, as though the ripe old portrait were talking. But as she listened

and looked at the magnificent physique of his wedge-like torso, tapering from broad shoulders to slender waist, she was conscious only of the compelling masculine that seemed to vibrate about him.

Here was a man with all the primal vigor of manhood. Were he living in days when women sought strong mates, Anse Havey would have had his choice of wives. She thought of the gentleman whom she had almost married and who lacked all this. Anse Havey was an outlaw and at home would seem a crude barbarian, but he was the sort of barbarian whose brain and body could lay a spell on those about him. A wild thrill of admiration tingled through her being, not such as any other man had ever caused, but such as she had felt when she watched the elemental play of lightning and thunder and wind along the mountain tops.

CHAPTER XIX

"IT'S only lonesome people," Anse Havey went on, "that knows how to love an' dream. I've stood up there on the ridge with Julius Cæsar and Alexander the Great, an' it seemed to me like I could see 'em, as plain as I see you now. I could see the sun shinin' on the eagles of the legions an' the solid shields of the phalanx. I'm rich enough, I reckon, to live amongst other men that read books, too, but a dream keeps me spendin' my days here. The dream is that some day these-here mountains shall come into their own. These people have got it in 'em ter be a great people, an' I've staid on here because I aimed to try an' help 'em."

"But," she faintly expostulated, "you seem to stand for the very things that hold them back. You speak almost reverently of their killing instinct and you oppose schools."

The man shook his head gravely and continued, "I'm a feudist because my people are feudists an' because I can lead 'em only so long as I'm a fightin' Havey. God knows if I could wipe out this blood-spillin' I'd gladly go out an' offer myself as a sacrifice to bring it about. You call me an' outlaw — well, I've done made laws an' I've done broke them an' I've seen just about as much crookedness an' lawlessness at one end of the game as at the other."

"But schools?" inquired Juanita. "Why wouldn't they help your dream toward fulfilment?"

"I ain't against no school that can begin at the right end. I'm against every school that can only onsettle an' teach dissatisfaction with humble livin' where folks has got to live humble."

He paused and paced the room. This man was no longer the man who had seemed the immovable stoic. His eyes were far away, looking beyond the horizons, into the future.

"It's took your people two centuries to get where they're standin' to-day," he broke out abruptly, "an' fer them two hundred years *we've* been standin' still or goin' back. Now ye come down here an' seeks to jerk my people up to where ye stands in the blinkin' of an eye. Ye comes lookin' down on 'em an' pityin' 'em because they won't eat outen your hand. They'd rather be eagles, than song-birds in a cage, even if eagles are wild an' lawless. Ye comes here an' straightway tells 'em that their leaders are infamous. Do ye offer 'em better leaders? Ye refuses the aid of men that know 'em — men of their blood — an' go your own ignorant way. Do ye see any reason why I should countenance ye? Don't ye see ye're just a-scatterin' my sheep before they knows how to herd themselves?"

"I'm afraid," said the girl very slowly and humbly, "that I've been a fool."

"Ye says the boy, Jeb, wear's my trademark in the hate that's on his face," continued Anse Havey passionately. "He's been here with me, consortin' with them fellers in Plutarch an' Shakespeare. If I can curb him an' keep him out of mischief he's goin' down to

Frankfort some day an' learn his lessons in the Legislature. He ain't goin' to no college because I aims to fit him for his work right here. I seek to have fellers like him guide these folks forward. I don't aim to have them civilized by bein' wiped out an' trod to death."

He paused while Juanita Holland repeated helplessly and half aloud, "I've been a fool!"

"I reckon ye don't know that young Jeb McNash thinks little Milt kilt Fletch, an' that one day he laid out in the la'rel to kill little Milt. Ye don't know that the only reason he stayed his hand was that I'd got his promise ter bide his time. But I reckon ye do know that if Milt was killed by a Havey all that's transpired in ten years wouldn't make a patch on the hell-raisin' that'd go on hereabouts in a week. Do ye think it's strange thet Jeb don't want his sister consortin' with the boy that he thinks murdered his father?"

Juanita rose from her chair, feeling like a pert and cocksure interloper who had been disdainfully looking down on one with a vision immeasurably wider and surer than her own. At last she found herself asking, "But surely young Milt didn't kill Fletch. Surely you don't believe that?"

"No, I know he didn't, but there's just one way I can persuade young Jeb to believe it — an' that's to tell him who did."

His eyes met hers and for a moment lighted with irony. "If I did *that* I reckon Jeb would be willin' to let ye keep Dawn an' Jesse — an' of course he'd kill the other man. Do ye want me to do it? Just say the word, ma'am, an' I'll call him in. It *may* not cost but one life ter let ye have your way. Life's right cheap

hereabouts. One or two more oughtn't hardly to stand between a lady an' her sacred mission." He moved to the closed door and paused with his hand on the knob.

"No, stop!" she almost screamed. "It would mean murder. Merciful God, it's so hard to decide some things!" Anse Havey turned back to the room. "I just thought I'd let ye see that for yourself," he said quietly; "ye ain't hardly been able ter see why it's hard for us people to decide 'em."

Suddenly a new thought struck her and it brought from her a sudden question. "But you know who the murderer is and you have spared him?"

The man laughed. "Don't fret yourself, ma'am. The man that killed Fletch has left the mountains an' right now he's out of reach. But he'll be back some day an' when he comes I reckon the first news ye'll hear of him will be that he's dead." Once more it was the implacable avenger who spoke by his gospel of a life for a life. The girl could only murmur in perplexity, "Yet you have kept Jeb in ignorance. I don't understand. It all seems so complicated."

"I've got other plans for Jeb," said Bad Anse Havey. "I don't 'low to let him be a feud killer. There's others that can attend to that." He flung the door open and called Jeb; and a moment later the boy, black of countenance, came in and stood glaring about with the sullen defiance of a young bull just turned into the ring where he is to face the matador. "Jeb," suggested the chief gravely, "I reckon if Dawn don't see young Milt again ye ain't goin' to object to her havin' an education, are ye?"

The boy stiffened and his reply was surly.

"I don't 'low ter hev my folks a-consortin' with no McBriars."

Anse Havey spoke again very quietly, "Milt didn't know no more about that killin' than I did, Jeb."

"How does ye know thet?" The question burst out fiercely and swiftly. The boy bent forward with his eyes eagerly burning above his high cheek-bones and his mouth stiff in a snarl of suspense. "How does ye know?"

"Because I know who did."

"Tell me his name!" The shrill demand was almost a shriek. Again Jeb's face had become ashen and his muscles were twitching. Anse laid a hand on his shoulder, but the boy jerked away and again confronted his elder while his voice broke from his lips in an excess of passion. "Tell me his name. By God, he b'longs ter me."

"No, I ain't goin' to tell ye his name just yet, Jeb," Anse calmly announced. "He ain't in these parts now. He's left the mountains an' it wouldn't do ye much good to know his name — yet. Two days after he comes back I'll tell ye all ye wants to know an' I won't try ter hinder ye, but ye must let the children stay over there at the school. Dawn's heart's set on it, an' it wouldn't be fair to break her heart."

The boy stood trembling in wrath and indecision. Finally his voice came dubiously. "Ye done give me yore hand once before thet es soon as ye knowed ye'd tell me — an' ye lied ter me."

Anse Havey shook his head with unruffled patience.

"No, I didn't lie to ye, son. I wasn't sure till after he left. I ain't never lied to no man."

A long silence fell on the room. Through the open window came the silvery call of a quail in some distant thicket. Jeb was remembering the tried friendship and unquestioned loyalty of this chief of clan, and the comradeship of the books, and the debts he owed to Anse Havey. After a while he raised his head and nodded in his compact. "I'll give ye my hand," he said, "an' I asks yore pardon fer callin' ye a liar. I wouldn't suffer no other man ter do hit in my hearin'."

When he left the room the girl rose from her chair.

"There is no way to thank you, Mr. Havey," she said with a touch of diffidence. "I don't believe that two wrongs ever yet made a right. I don't believe that you can win out to law by lawlessness. But I do believe you are sincere and I know that you're a man."

"And as for me," he said slowly, "I think ye're just tryin' to grow an oak tree in a flower pot, an' it can't be done. I think that all ye can do is to breed discontent — an' in these hills discontent is dangerous. But I ain't hinderin' your school an' I don't 'low to. Ye'll find out for yourself that it's a failure an' quit at your own behest."

"I sha'n't quit," she assured him, but this time she smiled as she said it. "I am going ahead and in the end I am going to undermine the régime of feud and illiteracy; that is, I and others like me. But can't we fight the thing out as if it were a clean game? Can't we be friendly adversaries? You've been very generous and I've been a bigoted little fool, but can't you forgive me and be friends?"

He straightened while his face hardened again. Slowly he shook his head. His voice was very grave

and uncompromising though without discourtesy. "I'm afraid it's a little too late for that."

Juanita slowly drew back the hand she had extended and her cheeks flushed crimson. It was the first time in her life that she had made an unsolicited proffer of friendship — and she had been rebuffed.

"Oh!" she murmured in a dazed, hurt voice, in which was no anger. Then she smiled and said, "Then there's nothing else to say, except to thank you a thousand times."

"Ye needn't have no uneasiness about my tryin' to hinder ye," he repeated slowly. "I ain't your enemy an' I ain't your friend. I'm just lookin' on an' I don't have no faith in your success."

"Don't you feel that changes must come?" she questioned a little timidly. "They have come everywhere else."

"They will come," his voice again rose vehemently. "But they'll be made *my* way — *our* way, not yours. These hills sha'n't always be a reproach to the State of Kentucky. They're goin' to be her pride some day."

"That's all," exclaimed the girl, flinging at him a glance of absolute admiration. "I don't care who does it, so long as it's done right. You've got to see sooner or later that we're working to the same end. You may not be my friend, but I'm going to be yours."

"I'm obleeged to ye," he said gravely, and, turning on his heel, left the room through the back door. For a while she waited for him to return and then, realizing that the interview was ended, she, too, turned and went out to the porch. It seemed to Juanita Holland as she climbed the ridge again, that a decade had passed

since the shadow of Jeb McNash had fallen across the flower bed. With that note from Anse Havey had come a crushing sense of her helplessness and a full realization that no wheel could turn when one of the dictators raised a forbidding hand. So she had gone, expecting to face vindictiveness, and had for the first time caught a glimpse of the soul that lay shuttered behind the mask of Anse Havey's veiled eyes. It had only been a glimpse and it made her want to see more. So she came back, thinking of a half-barbaric man of strong limbs and fearless heart, who walked under the constant menace of death, and who combined in his audacious make-up a dash of the magnificent. His was a thankless mission at best; a lonely vigil through a long night. Not only did he face the constant threat of McBriar hate, but to the outside world he was Bad Anse Havey, whose name was held in disrepute. Then the girl smiled, for the October air was still full of champagne sparkle and she was young enough to be stirred by the sterling mark of romance. At all events she had met a *man*. Here was no swordless sheath.

So when she reached the ridge and stood again under the poplar tree she looked first to the east where she could see the ox-teams still snaking logs down to the mill and others bringing up squared timbers for her buildings, and a happy smile lifted the corners of her subtly curved lips. She patted the bark of the big tree and, gazing affectionately at it as at an old and confidential friend, she murmured, "I'm back again, and it's all right." Then with another glance at the somber pile of brick she murmured, "Feud leader, lawmaker, law-breaker and student of Shakespeare! Of

course you're not at all typical, but you're a very interesting somebody, Honorable Bad Anse Havey."

But the smile faded as she turned and a patch of roof down the other way caught her eye and reminded her of something. She had yet the very delicate and unpleasant duty of telling young Milt McBriar that, to him, the school was closed and its hospitality withdrawn. She was glad he was still a boy for that would mean that in him remained a touch of chivalry and generosity. Soon young Milt would be going back to Lexington again to college, for he was one of the few boys of the hill aristocracy who were being given educations.

The girl had often wondered why it had not changed him more. He was almost as typical a mountaineer as those who stayed at home and in him she found a discouraging exponent of the immutability of heredity. As chance would have it young Milt rode by her place the next day. She knew he would come back the same way and that afternoon as he was returning she intercepted him beyond the turn of the road. With the foreign courtesy learned abroad he lifted his hat and dismounted. Juanita had always rather liked young Milt. The clear fearlessness of his eyes gave him a certain attractiveness, and his face had so far escaped the clouding veil of sullenness which she so often encountered.

At first she was a little confused as to how to approach the subject and the boy rolled a cigarette as he stood respectfully waiting.

"Milt," she said at last, "please don't misunderstand me. It's not because I want to, but I've got to ask you to give me a promise. You see I need your help."

At that the half smile left the boy's lips and a half frown came to his eyes.

"I reckon I know what ye mean," he said; "young Jeb, he's asked ye ter warn me off. Why don't Jeb carry his own messages?"

"Milt," she gravely reminded him, resting her hand for a moment on his coat-sleeve, "it's more serious than that. Jeb ordered me to send his sister back to the cabin. You are having an education. I want her to have one. She has the right to it. I love her very dearly, Milt, and if you are a friend you won't rob her of her chance."

The boy's eyes flashed. "Air ye goin' ter send her back thar, ter dwell amongst them razor-back hawgs an' houn'-dawgs an' fleas?" he demanded.

"That depends on you. Jeb is the head of his family. I can't keep her without his consent. I had to promise him that you shouldn't visit her."

For a moment the heir to McBriar leadership stood twisting the toe of his heavy boot in the dust and apparently studying the little circles it stamped out. Then he raised his eyes and contemplatively studied the mist-wreathed crests of the ridges.

At last he inquired, "What hes Dawn got ter say?"

"Dawn hasn't said much," she faltered, remembering the girl's tirade. Then she confessed: "You see, Milt, just now Dawn is thinking of herself as a Havey and of you as a McBriar. All I ask is that you won't try to see her while she's here at the school — not at all events until things are different."

The boy was wrestling with youth's unwillingness to be coerced.

"An' let Dawn think that her brother skeered me off?" he questioned at last with a note of rising defiance.

"Dawn sha'n't think that. She shall know that you have acted with a gentleman's generosity, Milt — and because I've asked you to do it."

"Hain't I good enough ter keep company with Fletch McNash's gal?" The lad was already persuaded, but his stubbornness fired this parting shot.

"It's not a question of that, Milt, and you know it," declared Juanita. "It's just that one of your people killed one of his. Put yourself in Jeb's place." Still for a while the boy stood there, scowling down at the ground, but at last he raised his face and nodded.

"It's a bargain, ma'am, but mind I only says I won't see her hyar — some day I'll make Jeb pay fer it." He mounted and rode away while the lazy, hazy sweetness of the smoky mists hung splendidly to the ridges and the sunset flamed at his back.

Juanita never knew what details of the incident came to Old Milt's ears, but when next the head of the house passed her on the road he spoke with a diminished cordiality, and when she stopped him he commented a little bitterly, "I hear ye're a runnin' a Havey school over thar now. Little Milt tells me ye warned him offen yore place." She tried to explain and though he pretended to accept all she said in good humor, she knew in her heart she had made a powerful and bitter enemy.

Even now when the desolate fall rains must soon wash all the color from the hills and leave them reeking and gray, the drought hung on. It had been unprecedented

and sometimes the smoke of the ridges mingled with the real smoke of forest fires. In places as one rode the hills one came upon great blackened stretches where charred and blistered shafts alone remained in memory of the magnificent forestry of yesterday.

One afternoon Anse Havey, wandering through the timber on his own side of the ridge, came upon a lone hunter and when he drew near it proved to be young Milt McBriar.

"Mornin', Milt," said the Havey, "I didn't know ye ever went huntin' over here."

The boy, who in feud etiquette was a trespasser, met the scrutiny with a level glance.

"I was a-gunnin' fer boomers," he said, using the local phrase for the red squirrels of the hills; "I reckon I hain't hardly got no license ter go gunnin' on yore land."

Anse Havey sat down on a log and looked up at the boy steadily. At last he said gravely:

"Hunt as much as ye like, Milt, only be heedful not to start no fires." Milt nodded and turned to go, but the older man called him back. "I want to have a word with ye, Milt," he said soberly. "I ain't never heard that neither the McBriars nor the Haveys countenanced settin' fire to dwellin' houses, have you?"

"I don't know what ye means," responded the boy, and the gaze that passed between them was that of two men who can look direct into any eyes.

"I 'lowed it would astonish ye," went on the older man. "Back of the new school-house, that's still full of shavin's an' loose timber there's a little stretch of dry woods that comes right down to the back door.

Somebody has done laid a trail of shavin's an' leaves in the brush there, an' soaked 'em with coal-oil. Some feller aims to burn down that school-house to-night."

"Did ye tell Miss Holland?" demanded Milt, in a voice of deep anxiety.

"No, I ain't named it to her." Bad Anse sat with a seeming of indifference in his face, at which the lad's blood boiled.

"Does ye aim ter set hyar an' let her place git burnt up?" he snapped out wrathfully. "Because if ye does, I don't."

Anse Havey laughed. "Well, no," he replied, "I didn't aim to do that." Suddenly he rose. "What I did aim to do, Milt, was this: I aimed to go down there to-night with enough fellers to handle either the fire or whoever starts it. I aimed to see who was doin' a trick like that. Will you go with me?"

"Me?" echoed Milt in astonishment. This idea of the two factions acting in concert was a decided innovation. It might be loaded. It might be a trap. Suddenly the boy demanded, "Why don't ye ask pap?"

"I don't ask your pap nothing." In Havey's reply was a quick and truculent snap that rarely came to his voice. "I'm askin' you, an' you can take my proposition or leave it. That house-burner is goin' to die. If he's one of my people I want to know it. If he's one of your people you ought to feel the same way. Will you go with me?"

The boy considered the proposal for a time in silence. Dawn would be in danger! At last he said gravely: "Hit sounds like a fa'r proposition. I'll go along with ye an' meantime I'll keep my own counsel."

CHAPTER XX

ANSE HAVEY had been looking ahead. When Old Milt McBriar had said, " Them Haveys 'lows thet I'd cross hell on a rotten plank ter do 'em injury," he had shot close to the mark. Bad Anse knew that the quiet-visaged old murder-lord could no more free himself from guile and deceit than the rattler can separate himself from the poison which impregnates its fangs and nature.

When he had taken Milt's hand, sealing the truce, he had not been beguiled, but realized that the compact was only strategy and was totally insincere. Yet in young Milt he saw possibilities. He was accustomed to rely on his own judgment and he recognized a clean and sterling strain in the younger McBriar. He hated the breed with a hatred that was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, but with an eye of prophecy he foresaw the day when a disrupted mountain community must fall asunder unless native sons could unite against the conquest of lowland greed. He could never trust Old Milt, but he hoped that he and young Milt, who would some day succeed to his father's authority, might stand together in that inevitable crisis.

This idea had for a long time been vaguely taking shape in his mind, and when he met young Milt in the woods and proposed uniting to save Juanita's school he was laying a corner-stone for that future alliance.

At sunset young Milt came and he came without having spoken of his purpose at his own house. The night was sharp and moonless with no light save that which came from the coldly glittering stars and Anse and young Milt crouched for hours, knee to knee in the dead thickets, keeping watch.

At last they both saw a creeping figure which was only a vague shadow moving among shadows and they peered with straining eyes and raised rifles. But the shadow fell very still and since it was only by its movement that they could detect it they waited in vain. What hint of being watched was given out no one could say. The woods were still and the two kneeling figures in the laurel made no sound. The other men, waiting at their separated posts, were equally invisible and noiseless, but some intangible premonition had come to the shadow which lost itself in the impenetrable blackness and began its retreat with its object unaccomplished.

Young Milt went back to his house in the cold mists of dawn. No shot had been fired, no face recognized, but the Havey and the McBriar both knew that the school had been saved by their joint vigilance.

Some days later the news of that night-watch leaked through to Jerry Everson who bore the tidings to Juanita, and she wrote a note to Anse Havey, asking him to come over and let her express her thanks in person.

The mail rider brought her a brief reply, penned in a hand of copy-book care.

"I don't take any credit," [said the writer]. "I only did what any other man would do and young Milt McBriar did as

much as I did. Thank him if you want to. It would only be awkward for me to come over there. Respectfully, ANSE HAVEY."

The girl laid the letter down with a sense of disappointment and chagrin. She had been accustomed to having men come to her when she summoned them, and come willingly. For a time she was deeply apprehensive, too, lest the effort which had failed at first might be more successfully repeated, but that week brought the long-delayed rains. They stripped the hills of glory and left them gray and stark and dripping. The horizon reeked with raw fogs and utter desolation settled on the mountains.

Trickling streams were torrents again and the danger of fires was over. Old Milt McBriar heard of his son's part in the watching of the school, and brooded blackly as he gnawed at the stem of his pipe, but he said nothing. The boy had been sent away to college and had been given every advantage. Now he had unwittingly, but none the less surely, turned his rifle on one of his father's hirelings bent on his father's work, for the oil-soaked kindling had been laid at Old Milt's command. The thing did not tend to make the leader of the McBriars partial to the innovations from Down-below.

One day when Juanita went down to the post-office which nestled unobtrusively behind the single counter of the shack store at the gap, she found a letter directed in a hand which set her heart beating and revived many old memories.

The sun had come out after those first rains and a little of the Indian summer languor still slept along the skyline, but the woods were for the most part bare and

the air was piercing. In a formless mass of wet mold, that no longer rattled crisply underfoot, lay all the leaves that had a few days ago been stitches in the tapestried and embroidered mantle of the hills; all except a few tenaciously clinging survivors and the russet of the scrub oaks. The pines that had been sober greens through the season of flaming color were still sober greens when all else had turned to cinnamon and slate. But in spite of the cold Juanita wished to carry that letter up to the crest and read it there under the poplar tree. As she climbed she heard the whistle of quail off in a cornfield and two or three rabbits jumped up and loped into the cover, flaunting their cotton tails. So she tore the end from her envelope and began to read the letter, from the man she had sent away. He said that he had made a sincere effort to reconcile himself to her decision; the decision which exiled him. The effort had failed. He had been to the Mediterranean and the East.

"Do you remember the terrace at Shepherd's, when you and I sat there together?" he asked, and the girl who knew him so well could fancy the lonely longing in his face as he had written it.

"Can you close your dear eyes and see again the motors purring by and the donkeys and camels and street fakirs with cobras in flat baskets and apes on chains? Can you hear the laughter of the tea-drinkers under the awnings and the Fellaheen chatter and Viennese orchestras contending with the tom-toms of returning pilgrims? Dearest, can you see the blue triangles of shadow that the pyramids throw down in the moonlight on the yellow sands of the desert? The des-

ert has no loneliness greater than mine." She let the letter drop for a moment. Loneliness? Suddenly she felt that she herself was the loneliest person in the universe. Then she read again.

"Can you see the Jaffa Gate and the Tower of David in Jerusalem? I have been there — alone this time. Do you remember how you were touched by the fanatical devotion that lighted the heavy faces of the Russian peasants who had journeyed so far in their pilgrimages to the shrines of the Holy City? Can you see them again in their sheepskin jackets and felt boots and ragged beards creeping on hands and knees through the temple of the Sepulchre and kissing the stones?

"I, too, was a pilgrim seeking peace, but I did not find it. Can you not find it in your heart to be touched by *my* devotion? Not only happiness, but peace dwells where you are, and I am coming to you.

"Do not forbid me, for I am coming anyway. I am coming because I must; because I love you."

Yes, she remembered all the things of which he spoke — and many others. All the old life which she had renounced rose before her, slugging her senses with homesickness. Around her lay the escarpments of the isolated hills which would soon sink down to the sodden wretchedness of a shut-in winter.

She could see ahead, at that moment, only failure, and hear only the echoes of many warnings. Yet here she must stay because she had cast her lot among the sons and daughters of Martha, who

". . . do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose;

They do not preach that His Pity allows them to leave their work whenever they choose.
As in the thronged and the lighted ways so in the dark and the desert they stand,
Wary and watchful all their days, that their brethren's days may be long in the land. . . ."

She sat for a long time gazing off at the distances, and shivered a little in the bite of the raw air. Then she looked up and saw a figure at her side. It was Bad Anse Havey.

He bowed and stripped off his coat, which, without asking permission he threw around her shivering shoulders. "I didn't aim to intrude on ye," he said slowly. "I didn't know ye was up here. Do ye come often?"

"Very often," she answered, folding the letter and putting it back into its envelope. "When I first came to the Widow Everson's I discovered this tree and it seemed to beckon to me to come up. Look!" She rose and pointed off with a gauntleted hand. "I can stand here and see the fortifications of my two enemies. There is your place and there is Milt McBriar's." She smiled with unconscious archness. "But I'm not going to let you be my enemy any more. I've decided that you have got to be my friend, whether you want to be or not — and what I decide upon, must be."

Bad Anse Havey stood looking into her eyes with the disconcerting steadiness of gaze that she always found it difficult to sustain, but his only response was a sober, "I'm obleeged to ye."

Perhaps that letter with its old reminders had brought back a little of the old self and the old self's innocent coquetry. She stood with her gauntleted hands in the

deep pockets of her sweater jacket, and his coat hanging from her shoulders. About her deep violet eyes and sensitive lips lurked a subtle appeal for friendship — perhaps, though she did not know it, for love.

"I have behaved abominably to you, Mr. Havey," she confessed.

"It's natural that you should refuse me forgiveness." For a moment her eyes danced and she looked up challengingly, into his face. "But it's natural, too, that I should refuse to let you refuse. We are going to be friends. I am going to smash your old feud to splinters and I'm going to beat you, and just the same we are going to be friends." Again his reply was brief.

"I'm obleeged to ye."

Against the girl who had scorned him and denounced him, Anse Havey's wounded pride had reared a fortress of reserve, and yet already he felt its walls tumbling. The smile in her eyes was carrying it by assault. It had no defense against the sweetness of her voice. He had for the most part known only the women who live to work and raise large families; who servilely obey the lordly sex and soon wither. He had in him much of the woman-hater, and he did not realize that it was because he had never before known a woman who was at once as brave and intelligent as himself and as exquisite in charm as the wildflowers on his hillsides. This girl who smiled at him was not the same woman he had resolved to hate, whose friend he had declined to be. She was a new and fragrant being in whose presence he suddenly felt himself unspeakably crude.

"You have been very good to me," she went on and

the note of banter left her voice, "and you refused to let me thank you."

For a moment he was silent then he said, awkwardly, "I reckon it's pretty easy to be good to you." After that she heard him saying in a very soft voice.

". . . One of the first things I remembers is being fotched up here by my mammy when I was a spindlin' little chap. She used to bring me up here and tell me Indian stories. Some times my pappy came with us, but mostly it was just my mammy an' me."

"Your father was a soldier, wasn't he?" she asked.

"Yes. He was a captain in Morgan's command. When the war ended he come on back here an' relapsed. I reckon I'd oughter be right-smart ashamed of that, but somehow I'm tol'able proud of it. He 'lowed that what was good enough for his folks was good enough for him—" He broke off suddenly and a smile came to his face; a remarkably naïve and winning smile, the girl thought. Striking an attitude, he added, in a tone of mock seriousness, and perfect lowland English, marred by no trace of dialect. "I beg your pardon, Miss Holland. I mean that what was sufficiently good for his environment appeared adequate to him."

The girl's laughter pealed out in the cool air and she said with an after-note of surprise, "Why, Mr. Havey, you didn't speak like a mountain man then. I thought I was listening to a 'furriner.'"

He nodded his head and the smile died from his lips. Into his eyes came the look of steady resolve which was willing to fight for an idea.

"I just did that to show ye that I could. If I wanted

to I reckon I could talk as good English as you. I reckon ye won't hardly hear me do it no more."

"But why?" she inquired in perplexity.

"I reckon it sounds kinder rough an' ign'rant to ye; this mountain speech. Well, to me it's music. It's the language of my own people an' my own hills. I loves it. It don't make no diff'rance to me that it's bad grammar. Birds don't sing so sweet when ye teaches 'em new tunes. To my ears the talk of Down-below is hard an' unnatural. I don't like the ways nor the speech of the flat countries. An' as for me I'll have none of it. Besides I belongs here an' if I didn't talk like they do, my people wouldn't trust me." He paused a moment, then added, "I'd hate to have my people not trust me. So if ye don't mind I reckon I'll go on talkin' as I learnt to talk."

She nodded her head. "I see," she said quietly.

"What do ye aim to call this school?" asked the man suddenly.

"Why, I thought I'd call it the Holland School," she answered; and when he shook his head and said peremptorily, "Don't do it," she colored.

"I didn't mean to name it for myself, of course," she explained. "I wanted to call it after my grandfather. He always wanted to do something for education here in the Kentucky hills."

"I didn't mean to find no fault with the name of Holland," he assured her gravely. "That's as good a name as any. But don't call it a school. Call it a college."

"But," she demurred, "it's not going to be a college. It's just a school."

Again the boyish smile came to his face and seemed to erase ten years from his seeming of age. His manner of speech made her feel that they were sharing a secret.

"That don't make any difference," he announced. "Mountain folks are almighty proud an' touchy. I shouldn't be astonished if some gray-haired folks came to study the primer. They'll come to college all right, but it wouldn't hardly be dignified to go to school. If you want to get 'em ye must needs call it a college."

The girl looked at him again and said in a soft voice: "You are always teaching me things I ought to know. Thank you."

CHAPTER XXI

SHE stood as he left and watched him striding down the slope; and he went back to his house and found it suddenly dark and cheerless and unsatisfying. His retainers noted that he was silent and abstracted, and often when the fingers of the cold rains were drumming at midnight on the roof, they heard, too, his restive feet, tramping his room. For into the soul of Bad Anse Havey had come a new element, and the prophet which was in him could descry in the future a new menace; a necessity for curbing the grip of this new dream which might easily outgrow all his other dreams and bring torture to his heart. Here was a woman of fine fiber and delicate culture in whose eyes he might at best be an interesting barbarian. Between them lay all the impassable barriers that quarantined the tangled coves of the mountains from the valleys of the rich lowlands. Between their lives and view-points lay the same irreconcilable differences.

And yet her image was haunting him as he went his way, and in his heart was awakening an ache and a rapture. He told himself that it would be wiser to stay away. He could no longer think of her as a schoolteacher. Her school was nothing to him, but she herself had come and awakened him, and he dreaded what might follow.

On several of her buildings now the hammers were

busy shingling the roofs. Her influence grew and spread among the simple folk to whom she was unostentatiously ministering; an influence with which the old order must some day reckon. It was a quiet and intangible sort of thing, but it was gradually melting the hardness of life as spring sun and showers melt the austerity of winter.

Anse Havey set his face against crossing her threshold with much the same resolution that Ulysses stuffed his ears against the siren song — and yet with remarkable frequency they climbed at the same time from opposite directions and met by the poplar tree on the ridge.

"It's the wrong notion," he told her obstinately when her enthusiasm broke from her in new plans and prophecies. "It's teachin' things that's goin' ter make the children ashamed of their cabins an' their folks. It's goin' ter make 'em want things ye can't hardly give 'em.

"Go to any cabin in these hills an' ye'll find the pinch of poverty, but ye won't find shame for that poverty in none of 'em. We ain't got so many virtues here maybe, but we've got a few. We can wear our privations like a uniform that we ain't ashamed of . . . yes, an' make a kind of merit out of it."

"I'm not out of sympathy with that," she argued, "I think it's splendid."

"All right," he answered, "but after ye've taught 'em a few things they won't think it's splendid. Ye'll breed discontent an' then ye'll go away, an' all ye'll have done will be to have knocked their one simple virtue down round their ears."

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm not going away?" demanded the girl a little hotly. "Just watch me."

Again he shook his head and into his eyes came a look of sudden pain. "I reckon ye'll go," he said. "All good things go. The birds go when winter comes an' the flowers go."

So in an impersonal way they kept up their semblance of a duel and mocked each other.

"When the crusaders went to Jerusalem," she told him smilingly, "and Richard, the Lion-hearted, met the Saracen, he admitted that he had come to know a gallant enemy — but a heathen none the less, and war went on." She paused and her challenge was a thing that danced in her eyes and at her lips, all tangled up with the banter of cordial friendliness, "Now, Mr. Havey, I admit that you are a brave enemy, but you stand for the heathen order and I'm going to wipe out that order. You'd better surrender to me while you still have a chance to do it with the honors of war."

The naïve smile came to his lips again for a moment and made him seem a boy.

"I'm much obleeged, ma'am," he acknowledged. "It's right well-favored of ye to offer me so much mercy, but if I remembers rightly, them crusaders didn't take Jerusalem away with 'em, did they?"

He looked down at her and indolently stretched the long arms in which the sinews were like raw-hide thongs, and the ripple of muscles like those of a race-horse on the very edge of his training.

"I may be foolish," he said slowly, "but I could

pick ye up like a doll. Somehow hit's right hard fer me ter realize thet ye're a-goin' ter smash me."

"'Thrice armed is he who hath his quarrel just,'" she flashed at him.

"Yes'm, a poet said that." She was now quoting from one of the few writers he knew as well as she did herself. "But a soldier once said, 'God's on the side of ther heaviest battalions.' When the battle's all over the poet comes in handy, but whilst it's still goin' on, I'd ruther take the evidence of the soldier." It was very easy for him to think of her as supreme in the conquest of love, but very difficult to take her seriously as a force for altering the conditions that had stood so long.

"Before the march of civilization the wild order always goes down," she informed him with confidence. "It's history's lesson."

"Well, now, I'm not so sure ye ain't kinder doin' hist'ry an injustice," he contended. "The lesson I reads is that whenever civilization gets drawn too fine, an' weakens, it's a barbarian race that overruns it. It's the strong blood. Some day soon there won't be no pure American blood in America, except right here in these mountains. Thar's still a few of us left here."

Bad Anse Havey was raw material. He treasured on his book shelf a half-dozen volumes. These he knew as a wise man knows his own soul. Through them he had had the companionship of a few great minds, and beside them he had scant erudition. There lay in his life the materials for a human edifice of imposing lines and proportions — and the question was whether Life, the

builder, would rear them or leave them lying in unformed piles of possibility.

Once Judge Sidering rode over from Peril to visit the school and express his gratification at its building. Judge Sidering presided over the "High Court" of the circuit, and with him came Anse Havey. Juanita knew that His Honor had gone down to the State's metropolis and had sat as chairman in a convention to name a Governor. She knew that he had proven himself the most astute, the most audacious and the most successful of politicians. He had written a chapter into State history, not admirable, perhaps, but admirably bold. Such a man must have iron in his make-up, and yet when he was in the presence of Bad Anse Havey his attitude was that of vassal to over-lord, and she knew that he wore his judicial ermine at the behest and will of Anse Havey, and that he performed his duties subject to Anse Havey's orders.

. . . . . .

In an office which overlooks the gray stone Courthouse in Louisville, sat a youngish, broad-shouldered man of somewhat engaging countenance. In the small ante-room of his sanctum was a young woman who hammered industriously on a typewriter and told most of the visitors who called that Mr. Trevor was out. That was because most of those who came bore about them the unmistakable hall-mark of creditors. Mr. Trevor's list of creditors would have made as long a scroll as his list of business activities. Yet for all these cares Mr. Trevor was just now sitting with his tan shoes propped on his broad desk and his face was untroubled. He was

one of those interesting gentlemen who give a touch of color to the monotony of humdrum life. Mr. Trevor was a soldier of fortune who sold not his sword, but the very keen and flexible blade of his resourceful brain.

Roger Malcolm of Philadelphia knew him only as the pleasant and chance acquaintance of an evening spent in a New York club.

He had impressed the Easterner as a most fascinating fellow who seemed to have engaged in large enterprises here and there over the face of the globe. So when Mr. Malcolm presented his card in the office anteroom the young woman at the machine gave him one favoring glance and did not say that Mr. Trevor was out.

"So you are going to penetrate the wilds of the Cumberlands, are you?" inquired Mr. Trevor in his pleasing voice, as he grasped his visitor's hand. "Tell me just where you mean to go and I'll tell you how to do it with the least difficulty. The least difficulty down there is plenty."

"My objective," replied Mr. Malcolm, "is a place at the headwaters of a creek called Tribulation, some thirty miles from a town called Peril."

"I know the places — and their names fit them. I'd offer to go with you, but I'm afraid I wouldn't prove a benefit to you. I'm *non grata* with Bad Anse Havey, Esquire, and Mr. Milton McBriar, who are the local dictators."

Mr. Malcolm laughed. "In passing," he said, "I dropped in to talk over the coal-development proposition which you said would interest me."

Mr. Trevor reached into his desk and brought out several maps.

"The tentacles of the railroads are reaching in here and there," he began with the promoter's suave ease of manner. "It is a region which enterprise can no longer afford to neglect and the best field of all is as yet virgin and untouched."

"Why did you drop the enterprise yourself?" inquired his visitor.

"I didn't have the capital to swing it. Of course if it interests you and your associates it can be put through."

Malcolm nodded. "I am going primarily by way of making a visit," he said. "I meant to go before you roused my interest in your proposition and it occurred to me that I might possibly be able to combine business with pleasure."

The promoter looked up with a shade of surprise.

"You have friends out there in that God-forsaken tangle?" he inquired. "God help them!"

"A lady whom I have known for a long while is establishing a school there."

With the mention of the lady, Malcolm's voice took on an uncommunicative note and Mr. Trevor at once changed the topic to coal and timber.

CHAPTER XXII

THE girl from Philadelphia had for some days been watching the road which led in tortuous twists from Peril to the gap. She herself hardly realized how expectantly she had watched it. Her lips fell into a wistful droop and the little line between her eyes bespoke such a poignancy of pain that she seemed to be all alone in the world. She was thinking of the man she had sent away and wondering what their meeting would be like. And the girl of the hills, sitting near by, would look, with her fingers gripping themselves tightly together and an ache in her own heart. Deep in Dawn's nature, which had been coming of late into a sweetly fragrant bloom, crept the rancor of a fierce jealousy for the man from Down-below whom she had never seen, but whose letter could make Juanita forget present things and drift away into a world of other days, and other scenes; a world in which Dawn herself had no part.

Juanita was wondering if after all she had not misjudged Roger Malcolm. She wanted to think she had, because her heart was hungry for love. She had written to him sternly forbidding his coming and if he obeyed that mandate he would of course prove himself still weak and lacking in initiative. So she was waiting with a fluttering heart.

But on the day that he came she was not watching.

He had pushed on at a rate of speed which mountain patience would not have countenanced and had arrived in two hours less than the journey should logically have required. The heaving sides of his hired horse told almost as much of the eagerness that had driven him as did the frank worship of his face.

At the front fence he hitched his mount and walked noiselessly up to the larger house. Two feminine figures sat sewing in the hall as he silently opened the unlatched door and let himself in. One of them was a figure he knew even with its back turned; a figure which, because of something distinctively subtle and wondrous, could belong to no one else. The other was a mountain girl of undeniable beauty, but, to him, of no interest.

It was Dawn who saw him first and, with a glance that brought a resentful flash to her eyes, she rose silently and slipped out through a side door. Then as Juanita came to her feet with a little gasp and held out both hands the man's heart began to hammer wildly, and he knew that the fingers he held were trembling.

He would have taken her at once in his arms, but she held him off and shook her head.

"I told you not to come," she rebuked in a voice that lacked conviction.

"And I flagrantly disobeyed you," he told her, "as I mean henceforth to disobey you. Once I lost you because I played a weak game. You want a conqueror and I have always been a suppliant. Now I have changed my method."

"Oh!" said Juanita faintly. For just an instant she felt a leap at her heart. Perhaps after all he had

grown to her standard. That was how she must be won, if ever won, and she wanted to be won.

She saw him draw out of his pocket a small box and take from it a ring which she had once worn, but again she shook her head.

"Not yet, dear," she said very softly, "you haven't proven yourself a conqueror yet, you know. You've just called yourself one."

Then her heart misgave her, for after gazing into her eyes with a hurt look, the man masked his disappointment behind a smile of deference and said, "Very well, I can wait, but that's how it must be in the end."

In the end! Juanita knew that after all he had not changed.

He was still the man of brave intents and words — still the man who stood hesitant at the moment for a blow.

It was while Malcolm was Juanita's guest that Anse Havey broke his resolve and, for the first time, came through the gate of the school. She saw him come with a pleased little sense of having broken down his reserve, and a mild triumph of feminine victory.

It was a brilliant night in early November with a moon that had lured the girl and her guest out on the cold porch. The hills stood up like everlasting thrones through the glitter of moon and stars and frost and both of them were silent, both steeped in the wizardry of the night and the sense of mountain mystery. Suddenly the girl heard a familiar voice calling from the road.

"Can I come in? It's Anse Havey."

A moment later the mountaineer was standing on the

steps and shaking hands with Roger Malcolm, whom he greeted briefly and with mountain reserve.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Havey," said the man from Philadelphia, and the man of the hills only met the other's gaze and turned to Juanita.

"I was down at Peril with a couple of teams," he said, "an' I found a lot of boxes at the station for ye. I 'lowed ye didn't hardly have any teams handy, so I fotched 'em back to my house. I'll send them over in the mornin', but I thought I'd ride over to-night an' tell ye."

She had been wondering how, at a time of mired roads, she was to have those books, which she would soon need, brought across the ridge. Now he had solved the problem for her. Anse Havey stood leaning against a porch post, with his broad shoulders and clear-cut profile etched against the moonlight as he studied the Philadelphian. Suddenly he asked abruptly:

"Have ye found anything that interests ye in the coal an' timber line?"

Roger Malcolm glanced up and knocked the ash from his pipe against the rail of the porch. He had not suspected that his rambles about the hills with a set of maps and a geologist's hammer had been noted. He had not even mentioned it yet to Juanita because he hoped to surprise her with the record of his activities when he had accomplished more.

But he showed no surprise as he answered and answered with perfect frankness, "Yes and no. I came primarily to see how Miss Holland was progressing with her work. It's true I have thought something of

investing in mountain resources, but that lies in the future."

Havey nodded, and said quietly, "I hope ye decides to invest elsewhere."

"So far as a casual inspection shows, this country looks pretty good to me," said Malcolm easily. "I may buy here — provided, of course, the price is right."

"This country's mighty pore," said the head of the Haveys slowly. "About all it can raise is a little corn an' a heap of hell, but down underneath the rocks there's wealth."

"Then the man who can unlock the hills and get out that wealth and make it available, ought to be welcomed as a benefactor, ought he not?" inquired the Easterner with a smile.

"He won't be," was the short response.

"Why?"

"The men from outside always aim to get the benefit of that wealth an' then to move us off our mountains an' there ain't nowheres else on earth a mountain man can live. Developin' seems pretty much like plunderin' to us. We gen'rally asks benefactors like that to go away."

"And do they usually go?"

"No, not usually. They always goes."

"Do you expect me to believe that, Mr. Havey?" queried Malcolm, still smiling.

"I don't neither ask ye to believe it nor to disbelieve it," was the cool rejoinder. "I'm just tellin' it to ye, that's all."

Malcolm refilled his pipe and offered the tobacco

pouch to Havey. Anse shook his head with a curt "Much obleeged," and the visitor commented casually, "Well, we needn't have any argument on that score yet, Mr. Havey. My activities, if they eventuate, belong to the future and when that time comes perhaps we shall be able to agree after all."

"I reckon we won't hardly agree on no proposition for despoilin' my people, Mr. Malcolm."

"Then we can disagree, when the time comes," remarked the other man with a trace of tartness in his voice. "There is no need of it as yet."

"Then ye don't aim to develop us just now?"

Malcolm shook his head, the glow of his pipe bowl for a moment lighting up a face upon which lingered an amused smile. "Not this time. Another time perhaps."

"All right, then." Havey's voice carried a very masked and courteous, but very unmistakable warning. "Whenever ye get good an' ready — we'll argue that." He bowed to the girl and turned into the path which led down to the gate.

. . . . . .

It was one of those nights under whose brooding wings vague influences are astir and in the making. Dawn had gone back for a few days to her brother's lonely cabin on Tribulation to set his house in order and look after his simple mending. Perhaps in her own heart there was another reason, an unconfessed unwillingness to stay at the bungalow while she must feel so far away from Juanita, and see Roger Malcolm seeming so near. In her heart vague things were stirring,

too, and in another heart. The fact that she had not been allowed to see young Milt McBriar had given him an augmented importance which had kept the boy prominently in her thoughts despite her denunciations. Once she had met him on the road and he had stopped her to say, "Dawn, do ye know why I don't come over thar no more?"

The girl had only nodded, and the boy went on:

"Well, some day when ye're at Jeb's cabin, I'm a-comin' *thar*. I hain't a-goin' ter come slippin', but I'm comin' open an' upstandin' an' Jeb an' me are goin' ter talk about this business."

"No! No!" she had exclaimed, genuinely frightened and in a voice full of quick dissent. "Ye mustn't do it, Milt, ye mustn't. Ef ye does I won't see ye."

"We'll settle that when I gits thar. I jest 'lowed I'd tell ye," said the boy stubbornly. "I reckon I mustn't talk ter ye now — I'm pledged," and without another word he shook up the reins on his horse's neck and rode away.

So to-night while the moon was weaving its spell over several hearts, the son of the McBriar leader was riding with a set face over into the heart of the Havey country, to openly visit the daughter of Fletch McNash.

Jeb was sitting before the fire in his cabin with a pipe between his teeth, and Dawn was idly plunking on a banjo — not the old folk-lore tune that had once been her repertoire, but a newer and sweeter thing that she had learned from Juanita Holland.

Then as a confident voice sang out, from the darkness, "I'm Milt McBriar an' I'm a-comin' in," the banjo fell from the girl's hands and her fingers clutched

in panic at her breast. She saw her brother rise in angry astonishment from his chair, and heard his voice demand truculently, "What ther hell does *you* want hyar?"

CHAPTER XXIII

THOUGH Anse Havey strode up the steep trail to the crest that night with long elastic strides, seeking to burn up the restlessness which obsessed him, he found himself at the top with no wish for sleep, and no patience with the idea of confining his thoughts between walls. It was better out here under the setting moon and the twinkling stars, even though he wore no overcoat and rims of ice were forming along the edges of the water courses.

His mind traveled back in review over the past — a past that had never been lighted with cheer or happiness. His whole life heretofore had sought satisfaction in a fierce devotion to one passionate ideal — his people. It had been a sum of stern days and not since his mother had told him Indian stories under this same tree did he remember a single clear note of tenderness or sweetness in its tune or tenor.

Down in Frankfort he had walked silently with his chin in the air and a challenge in his eye. About him had been the suave and tricky politicians of the cities and the high-headed, aristocratic sons of the Bluegrass, and there among them, but not of them, he had felt like a poor boy at a frolic. His assumption of arrogant aggressiveness had really been only a mask for a painful diffidence, so that if any lip felt an inclination to

curl at this tall saturnine law-maker from the far hills, no lip gave expression to the impulse.

He had stood apart at the Inaugural Ball, looking out on the flash and color of the evening dress and the uniformed staff with a feeling of contempt. A beautiful woman with pearls sparkling softly on her neck had whispered to her escort as they passed him, "What a splendid savage! He looks like a wild chief at a durbar."

But to-night Anse Havey felt that something was missing from his life; something of the barbarian order had become suddenly hateful to him. Into the gray eyes crept a dumb suffering and the brows came together in helpless perplexity.

Juanita was a woman of an exotic race who chose to think that life comes to perfection only under glass. He was a leader of a briar-tangled and shaggy clan; men who were akin to the eagles. No menace or threat of death had ever made him deviate from his loyalty to that people. But now a foreign woman had come and he was comparing himself with the well-dressed, soft-voiced man who was her visitor, and feeling himself a creature of repellant uncouthness. He found himself wishing that he, too, was smoother. Then he flung the thought from him with bitter self-contempt and a low oath broke from his lips. Was he growing ashamed of his life? Was he wishing that his eagle's talons might be manicured and his pinions combed? "If ye've done come down to that, Anse Havey," he said aloud, "it's about time ye kilt yourself."

No, he protested to his soul, he had disliked Roger Malcolm because Roger Malcolm had spoken of a proj-

ect of plunder, and stood for his enemies of the future, but his soul answered that he thought little of that, and that it was because of the obvious understanding between the man and Juanita Holland that a new hatred had been born in his heart.

After Anse had gone Malcolm and the girl turned back to the fire-lit hall and sat a while in silence. When from her lips came something very like a sigh, Roger took the pipe from his mouth with a quick instinctive movement.

"What is it, dear?" he whispered, as he bent forward closer to her, longing to take her in his arms.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she inquired with a note of reproach, "that aside from seeing me, you had another mission here?"

"The other mission was nothing," he declared. "I came to see you. I didn't tell you that I was also representing an Eastern Syndicate because I wanted first to form a more definite opinion. I thought you'd be pleased. You came down here, against all my protestations, with one idea in your dear head. You were bent on development in a country that has stood still for two centuries. You are spending the best of your youth and enthusiasm and vitality in that effort."

He broke off and his eyes told her how he wanted to see her spend her youth and enthusiasm and vitality, but she met his gaze with troubled eyes and said only: "Well?"

"Well, I wanted to work to the same end; to be, in a fashion, your partner in endeavor. Don't you know that before civilization can go into any place where it has not been, it must have roads over which to go?

Civilization has only one great agency — highways. The Roman ditch and wall have long ago crumbled, but the Roman roads are still her monuments. That was my ambition. I should be a road-builder doing a man's work and doing it at your side."

"It seems," she said a little wearily, "that we can't even understand each other without explanations. I have no right of course to argue with you against the profitable investment of your money, but don't let's call it by glittering and misleading names."

Roger Malcolm stiffened and his voice was aggrieved.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I don't quite understand you, either. I spoke sincerely."

"I don't mean to be nasty-tempered and unsympathetic —" she assured him in a softer voice. "I had the same ideas a year ago. I believed in civilizing people by force, too — then. But I don't now. I know that out of all this the native men and women will reap no benefit — that they will be nothing better than evicted creatures. And you see, Roger —" her voice became tender —"it's not just the rocks and fagots of the eagle's eyrie that I'm interested in; it's the old eagles and the little fledgling eagles themselves."

"My plan looks to the building a nobler and more symmetrical structure on the site of that pile of fagots," he argued; "a structure that shall endure."

"I know," she said, nodding her head. "Some centuries hence the world will see only that, and praise you. But I'm thinking of this century, Roger dear. Your structure must rise on ruins and the ashes of conquest. Your march of civilization must be predatory, as such marches always have been. It will mean driv-

ing people who can only be led. What manner of men will come at your front?"

"Decent young chaps with transit and chain," he assured her. "The sort of fellows who are always at the front of marching progress; the sort of men who do the world's work."

"You forget the men that go ahead of *them;* the real vanguard," she retorted. "They are purchasable natives; hangers-on at the dirty fringe of things; the native shyster will be fighting your battles in Court; the native assassin who does not kill from distorted sense of honor, but for the foreign dollar, will be disposing of enemies whom your shysters can't handle."

"Surely," said the man, "you don't think I'd countenance such damnable methods as that?"

"No," she spoke in a low voice, "you'll just light a fire that you can't control, that's all."

"If you feel that way, I'll draw out of it," he hastened to assure her.

"I'm afraid," she answered, "it's too late. You must report back to your colleagues. Perhaps you'd better stay in, and try to control them."

. . . . . .

At the scant welcome of his greeting, young Milt McBriar stiffened a little from head to foot, though he had not anticipated any great degree of cordiality.

He climbed the stile and walked across the moonlit patch of trampled clay to where the girl stood, weak-kneed with fright in the lighted frame of the door.

"Jeb," he said slowly, to the boy who had stepped down into the yard, "how air ye?" Then turning

to Dawn, with his hat in his hand, he greeted her gravely.

But the son of the murdered man stood very still and rigid and repeated in a hard voice, "What ther hell does ye want hyar?"

"I come over hyar ter see Dawn," was the calm response and then as the girl leaned for support against the dirty frame, convulsively moistening her dry lips with her tongue, she saw her brother's hand sweep under his coat and come out gripping a heavy revolver. Jeb had never gone armed before that night when Fletch fell. Now he was never unarmed.

"Don't, Jeb!" she screamed in a transport of alarm, as she braced herself and summoned strength to seize the hand that held the weapon. Jeb shook her roughly off and wheeled again to face the visitor, with the precaution of a sidewise leap. He had expected that the other boy would have used that moment of interference to draw a weapon, but the young McBriar was standing in the same attitude, holding his hat in one hand while he reassured the girl. "Don't fret, Dawn; thar hain't nothin' ter worry about," he said calmly. Then, facing the brother, he went on in a voice of cold and almost scornful composure.

"Thet hain't ther first time ye've seed me acrost the sights of a gun, is it, Jeb?"

"What does ye mean by thet?" The other boy's face went brick red, and he lowered his muzzle with a sense of sudden shame.

"Oh, I heered about how old Bob McGreeger told ye a passel of lies about me, an' how ye come acrost ther ridge one day. I reckon I kin guess the rest."

"Well, what of hit?" Jeb stood with his pistol now hanging at his side, but in his eyes still glowed the fire of hatred.

"Jest this," young McBriar went on. "I ain't got no gun on me. I ain't even got a jack-knife. I 'lowed that ye mout be right-smart incensed at my comin' hyar an' I come without no weapon on purpose. Ef ye hain't skeered of me when I'm unarmed, I reckon ye kin put yore own gun back in ther holster."

Jeb McNash slowly followed the suggestion, and then, coming forward until the two boys stood eye to eye, he said in deliberate accents, "I reckon ye don't 'low I'm skeered of ye."

"I reckon not." Young Milt's tone was almost cheerful. "I reckon ye air jest about as much skeered of me es I am of you — an' that ain't none."

"What does ye want hyar?" persisted Jeb.

"I wants first to tell ye — an' I hain't never lied ter no feller yit — thet I don't know nothin' more about who kilt Fletch then *you* does. If I did, so help me God Almighty, I'd tell ye. I hain't tryin' ter shield no murderers." There was a ring of sincerity in the lad's voice that carried weight even into the bitter scepticism of Jeb's heart, a scepticism which had refused to believe that honor or truth dwelt east of the ridge.

"I reckon, ef that's true," sneered the older boy, "thar's them in yore house thet does know."

At that insult it was young Milt whose face went first brick red, and then very white.

"Thet slur calls fer a fight, Jeb," he said, with forced calm. "I can't hearken ter things like thet about my folks. But first I wants ter say this: I come over

"Don't fret Dawn; thar hain't nothin' ter worry about," he said calmly.

hyar ter tell ye thet I knowed how ye felt, an' thet I didn't see no reason why you an' me hed ter quarrel. I come over hyar ter see Dawn, because I promised I wouldn't try ter see her whilst she stayed down thar at the school — an' because I wants ter see her — an' I 'lows ter do hit. Will ye lay aside yore gun an' go out thar in ther road whar hit hain't on yore own ground, an' let me tell ye thet ye lied, when ye slurred my folks?"

The two boys stripped off their coats, in guarantee that neither had hidden a weapon. Then while the girl who was really no longer a girl, turned back into the fire-lit cabin and threw herself face downward on her feather bed they silently crossed the stile into the road, and Milt turned to repeat, "Jeb, thet war a lie ye spoke, an' I wants ye ter fight me fa'r, fist an' skull, an' when we gits through ef ye feels like hit we'll shake hands. You an' me ain't got no cause ter quarrel — barrin' what ye jest said an' we're goin' ter settle thet right now."

And so the boy in each of them which was the manlier part of each, came to the surface, and through a bitter and long-fought battle of fists and wrestling, in which both of them rolled in the dust, and each of them obstinately refused to say "enough," they submitted their long-fostered hostility to one fierce debate. At last as the two of them sat panting and bloodied there in the road it was Jeb who rose and held out his hand.

"So fur es the two of us goes, Milt," he said, "unless ther war busts loose argin I reckon we kin be friendly."

Together they rose and recrossed the stile and washed

their grimed faces in the same tin pan by the door. Dawn looked from one to the other, and Jeb said in his capacity as host, "Milt, set yoreself a cheer. I reckon ye'd better stay all night. Hit's most too fur ter ride back ter yore own house."

And so, though they did not realize it, the two youths who were to stand some day near the heads of the two factions, had set a new precedent and had fought without guns, as men had fought before the feud began.

Jeb kicked off his shoes and "lay down" and before the flaming logs sat the Havey girl and the McBriar boy, talking low-voiced and long into the night.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN winter has come and settled down for its long siege in the Cumberlands, human life shrinks and shrivels into a shivering wretchedness and a spirit of dreariness steals into the human heart.

The gaunt, gray hills reek and loom, sticky and deformed, between the snows and thaws. Roads become impassable mires and the total quarantine has begun. In dark cabins hearts given to brooding do little else but brood and Nature herself has no clarion of outer cheer with which to break the dangerous soul-cramping monotony.

The house of Old Milt McBriar was not so dark and cheerless a hovel as the houses of his lesser neighbors, but as that winter closed in, his heart was very bitter and his thoughts very black. In a round-about way he had learned of Young Milt's visit to the McNash cabin. His son was the apple of his eye and now he was seeing him form embryonic affiliations with the people of his enemy. Young Milt had visited Dawn; he had watched with Anse Havey. The father had always taken a natural pride in the honesty that gleamed from his son's alert eyes, and the one person from whom he had concealed his own ways of guile and deceit most studiously was the lad who would some day be leader in his stead. There were few things that this old in-

triguer feared, but one there was, and now it was tracing lines of care and anxiety in the visage that had always been so mask-like and imperturbable. If his son should ever look past his outward self and catch a glimpse of the inner man, the father knew that he would not be able to sustain the scorn of those younger eyes. So while the lad, who had gone back to college in Lexington, conned his books, his father sat before the blaze of his hearth, with his pipe tight-clamped between his teeth and his heart festering in his breast and his mind dangerously active.

The beginnings of all the things which he deplored, and meant to punish, went back to the establishment of a school with a "fotched-on" teacher. Had Dawn McNash not come there his boy's feet would not have gone wandering westward over the ridge, straying out of partisan paths. The slimness of her body, the lure of her violet eyes and the dusky meshes of her dark hair had led his own son to guard the roof that sheltered her against the hand of arson that the father had hired.

But most of all Anse Havey was responsible — Anse Havey who had persuaded his son to make common cause with his enemy. For that Anse Havey must die.

Heretofore Old Milt had struck only at lesser men, fearing the retribution of too audacious a crime, but now his venom was acute and even such grave considerations as the danger of a holocaust must not halt its appeasement.

Still the mind of Milt McBriar, the elder, had worked long in intrigue and even now it could not follow a direct line. Bad Anse must not be shot down in the road. His taking-off must be accomplished by a shrewder

method and one not directly traceable to so palpable a motive as his own hatred. Such a plan his brain was working out, but for its execution he needed a hand of craft and force — such a hand as only Luke Thixton could supply — and Luke was out West.

It was not his intention to rush hastily into action. Some day he would go down to Lexington and Luke should come East to meet him. There, a hundred and thirty miles from the hills, the two of them would arrange matters to his own satisfaction.

Roger Malcolm had gone back East and he had not after all gone back with a conqueror's triumph. He was now discussing in directors' meetings plans looking to a titanic grouping of interests which were to focalize on these hills and later to bring developments. The girl's school was gradually making itself felt and each day saw small classes at the desk and blackboards; small classes that were growing larger.

Now that Milt had laid the ground work of his plans he was making the field fallow by a seeming of general beneficence. His word had gone out along the creeks and branches and into the remote coves of his territory that it "wouldn't hurt folks none ter give their children a little l'arnin'."

In response to that hint they trooped in from the east wherever the roads could be traveled. Among those who "hitched an' lighted" at the fence were not only parents who brought their children, but those who came impelled by that curiosity which lurks in lonely lives. There were men in jeans and hickory shirts; women in gay shawls and linsey woolsey and calico; people from "back of beyond," and the girl felt her

heart beat faster, with the hope of ultimate and worthy success.

"I hear ye've got a right-plentiful gatherin' of young barbarians over there at the college these days," said Anse Havey one afternoon when they met up on the ridge. Her chin came up pridefully and her eyes sparkled.

"It has been wonderful," she told him. "Only one thing has marred it."

"What's that?" he asked.

"Your aloofness. Just because I'm going to smash your wicked régime," she laughed, "is no reason why you should remain peeved about it and sulk in your tent."

He shook his head and gazed away. Into his eyes came that troubled look which nowadays they sometimes wore.

"I reckon it wouldn't hardly be honest for me to come. I've told ye, I don't think the thing will do no good." He was looking at her and his hands slowly clenched. Her beauty, with the enthusiasm lighting her eyes, made him feel like a man whose thirst was killing him, and who gazed at a clear spring beyond his reach — or like the caravan driver whose sight is tortured by a mirage. He drew a long breath, then added, "I've got another reason an' a stronger one for not comin' over there very often. Any time ye wants me for anything I reckon ye knows ye can call on me."

"What is your reason?" she demanded.

"I ain't never been much interested in any woman." He held her eyes so directly that she felt a warm color suddenly flooding her cheeks, then he went on with

naked honesty and an unconcealed bitterness of heart. "When I puts myself in the way of havin' to love one I'll pick a woman that won't have to be ashamed of me — some mountain woman."

For an instant she stared at him in astonishment, then she exclaimed, "Ashamed of you! I don't think any woman would be ashamed of you, Mr. Havey." But, recognizing that her voice had been over-serious, she laughed and once more her eyes danced with gay mischief.

"Don't be afraid of me. I'll promise not to make love to you."

"I'm obleeged," he said slowly. "That ain't what I'm skeered of. I'm afraid ye couldn't hardly hinder me from makin' love to *you*."

He paused and the badinage left her eyes.

"Mr. Havey," she said with great seriousness, "I'm glad you said that. It gives us a chance to start honestly as all true friendship should start. In some things any woman is wiser than any man. You won't fall in love with me. You thought you were going to hate me, but you don't."

"God knows I don't!" he fiercely interrupted her.

She laughed.

"Neither will you fall in love with me. You told me once of your superior age and wisdom, but in some things you are still a boy. You are a very lonely boy, too, a boy with a heart hungry for companionship. You have had friends only in books — comradeship only in dreams. You have lived down there in that old prison of a house with a sword of Damocles hanging always over your head. Because we have been in a way

congenial you are mistaking our friendship for danger of love."

Danger of love! He knew that it had gone past a mere danger and his eyes for a moment must have shown that he realized its hopelessness, but Juanita shook her head and went on.

"Don't do it. It would be a pity. I'm rather hungry, too, for a friend. I don't mean for a friend in my work, but a friend in my life. Can't we be friends like that?"

She stood looking into his eyes and slowly the drawn look of gravity left his face.

He had always thought quickly and dared to face realities. He was now facing his hardest reality. He loved her with utter hopelessness. Her eyes told him that it must always be just that way and yet she had appealed to him; she had said she needed his friendship. To call it love would make it necessary for her to decline it. Henceforth life for Anse Havey was to mean a heart-ache, but if she wanted his allegiance she might call it by what name she would. It was hers.

Swiftly he vowed in his heart to set a seal on his lips and play the part she had assigned to him. He would not even let her know how near he had been to sweeping aside falsehood and telling her that for him to come to her except as a lover would be to come under false pretenses. Instead he slowly forced a smile, a boyish smile as though all his fears had been wiped away, and the old general in blue and buff could not have lied more with the gallantry of a gentleman.

"I'm right glad that ye said that," he assured her. "I reckon ye're right. I reckon we can go on fightin'

and bein' friends. Ye see, as I said, I didn't know much about women folks an' because I liked ye I was worried."

She nodded understandingly.

Suddenly he bent forward and his words broke impetuously from his lips. "Do ye 'low to marry that man, Malcolm?" He came a step toward her, then raising his hand swiftly, before she could respond, he exclaimed, "No — don't answer that question! That's your business. I didn't have no license to ask. Besides I don't want ye to answer it."

"It's a bargain, isn't it?" she smiled. "Whenever you grow lonely over there by yourself and find that Hamlet isn't as lively a companion as you crave, or that Alexander the Great is a little too fond of himself, or Napoleon is too moody, come over to my house and we'll try to cheer each other up."

"I reckon," he said with an answering smile, "I'm right liable to feel that way to-night, but I ain't a-comin' to learn civilization. I'm just comin' to see you."

. . . . . .

On a ranch out West Luke Thixton was riding range. While his pony drifted at night with the herds under the starry sky, he fretted bitterly for the crags and heights of his home and cursed the eternal flatness of the plains. To ride all day on an unbroken level irked his soul until it grew bitter within him, and he waited with feverish impatience for the letter from Milt McBriar which should end his exile.

Anse Havey knew nothing of the McBriar plans, but he surmised that Milt was planning a coup. He needed no revelation to divine the bitterness rising out of

young Milt's fondness for Dawn. That was a thing that was in embryo now, but some day it would inevitably grow to the proportions of a feud problem. Against that day of crisis, which might come in years or might come to-morrow, it behooved him to prepare . . . and he was preparing.

CHAPTER XXV

ONCE when Anse Havey had been tramping all afternoon through the wintry woods with Juanita, he had pointed out a squirrel that sat erect on a branch high above them with its tail curled up behind it. He had stopped her with a touch on the arm and pointed, then with a smile of amusement he handed her his rifle. He handed it to her with much the same manner that she might have handed him a novel in Russian, and his eyes said banteringly, "See what you can do with *that*."

But to his surprise she took the gun from his hands and leveled it as one accustomed to its use. Bad Anse Havey forgot the squirrel and saw only the slim figure in its loose sweater, only the stray wisps of curling hair and the softness of the cheek that snuggled against the rifle stock. Then came the report and the squirrel dropped.

She turned with a matter-of-fact nod and handed back the gun. "I'm rather sorry I killed it," she said, "but you looked so full of scorn that I had to show you. You know they do have a few rifles outside the Cumberland mountains."

"Where did you learn to shoot?" he demanded; and she answered, casually,

"I used to shoot a rifle and pistol, too, quite a good bit."

He took the gun back and unconsciously his hand caressed the spot where her cheek had lain against its lock. He had fallen into revery out of which her voice called him. They had crossed the ridge itself and were overlooking his house. "Why are they clearing that space behind your house? Are you going to put it in corn?"

"No," he laughed shortly. "Corn would be just about as bad as laurel."

He was instantly sorry he had said that. He had not meant to tell her of the plans he was making; plans of defense and, if need be, of offense. He had not intended to mention his precautions to prevent assassination at his own door or window.

But the girl understood and her voice was heavy with anxiety as she demanded, "Do you think you're in danger, Anse?"

"There's never a day I'm not in danger," he replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "I've gotten pretty well used to it."

"But some day," she broke out, "they'll get you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe," he said.

"Oh, don't you see the horrible futility of all this?" she protested, her cheeks flushing with her vehemence. "Don't you see that it all ends in nothing but an endless chain of bloodshed — the sacrifice of useful lives?"

"I've seen that all along." His voice was grave. "What I don't see is how to help it."

They turned and walked for a time in silence, then she heard him talking and his fashion of speech was that of pleading from a bruised heart.

"What do ye reckon I'm gainin' by it all? Do ye

'low that I like bein' a man the world belittles as a blood-spiller? Don't ye suppose I'd like to be able to raise my eyes to a woman like you without lookin' acrost a space I can't never come over? My God, do ye reckon that's pleasin'? Every time I starts acrost there to see ye in the night-time I knows that maybe I won't get there, because of the enemies that's plannin' in the blind dark. Do ye suppose I like that? — I like it — like hell." At the oath which had come quite unconsciously from his lips he saw Juanita draw away from his side with a little gesture of repulsion, and his own features stiffened. "I asks your pardon," he said. "We mountain men are just barbarians, ye know. Ye can't hardly expect much of us. Nobody didn't ever teach me that cussin' was impolite. Ye see I ain't learned manners."

"It isn't because it's bad manners," she said quietly, "but because there isn't any sense in your making a virtue of mountain faults. You aren't as little as that."

"I asks your pardon," he repeated humbly. "If ye don't like it, that's reason enough for me, I reckon."

"What were you saying?" she prompted; and he went on.

"Much as I hates the McBriars I know that a day's comin' when them and us have got to stand together against another enemy."

"What enemy?" she asked.

"I don't know; I only know he's comin'. Maybe it'll be your friend, Malcolm, maybe somebody else. But whoever it is I want to be here to fight him. I'm hopin' to last that long."

As her influence grew with Bad Anse Havey, so it was growing at the school. She had to turn away pupils who had come across the mountains on wearisome journeys because as yet she had only limited room and no teachers save herself — and Dawn to help her with the youngest.

At the front of the hall which led into the main school building was a rack with notches for rifles and pegs for pistols. She told all who entered that she made only one stipulation and that was that whoever crossed the threshold must leave his armament at the door. At first some men turned away again, taking their children with them, but as time went on they grudgingly acquiesced and at last with a sense of great victory she persuaded three shaggy fathers, who were coming regularly with their children, to ride back home unarmed.

Disarmament was her idea for the great solution and when Bad Anse came over, as he came every night now, she led him with almost breathless eagerness to the rack, and showed him two modern rifles and one antiquated squirrel gun.

"What's the idea?" he asked with his sceptical smile.

He found it very difficult to listen always to talk about the school in which he felt no interest and to regard his vow of silence as to her herself whom he dumbly worshiped.

"Look around you, Anse," she commanded. "Do you see any dirt or dust anywhere? No, we are teaching cleanliness and sanitation, but there is just one place here where the spiders are welcome to come and spin

their webs unmolested. It's that rack of guns. Did you ever hear of the shrine at Lourdes?"

"I reckon not," he confessed uneasily. Of late he had become a little ashamed of the things he did not know.

"Well, this is going to be like it, Anse. It is told that when the lame and halt and blind came to Lourdes to pray, they went away straight and strong and clear of vision. There hang at the shrine there numberless crutches and canes and bandages, discarded because the men who limped in or were carried there, went away needing them no more. Some day your old order of crippled things here in the mountains is going straight and strong, and these guns will be the discarded crutches."

He looked at her and if no response was stirred for her prophecy, at least he could not contemplate, without a stirring of enthusiasm, the flushed face and glowing eye with which she spoke. It was all worth while if it could bring that sparkle of delight to her countenance.

"It's right pretty, but it won't hardly work," he said. "These men will leave them guns just so long as they don't need 'em. I'm glad to see ye pleased — but I don't want to see ye disappointed."

"We'll see."

"It's the same old mistake, ye're makin'," he told her as they sat before the blaze of her fire. "Ye're seekin' to grow a poplar in a flower pot. You're overlookin' the fact that these people are human."

"No, I'm insisting that they're human. I'm trying to give them human privileges. Sanitation and soap are more powerful than guns."

Dawn passed the door at the side, pausing to nod to Anse Havey. She was very straight with her head raised and her delicate features thrown into relief in the firelight. Her carriage was as free and graceful as some wild thing's which is young and instinct with the joy of living.

"Look there," whispered the man, leaning forward. "Have you got girls back there in the cities straighter or sweeter than her? She's one of my people. Is anything the matter with her? Is that a weed or a flower?"

"She's a flower. So was her mother once. Do you remember the old woman — old at forty — inciting her son to go out and do murder? Shall Dawn come to that, too? All flowers were once weeds, and without cultivation all flowers will be weeds again."

He sat silent and the girl went on.

"Look at yourself. What is to become of your splendid heritage of body and brain and manhood? What will you be in twenty years, if they let you live that long? You will have left nothing but courage.

"You stand for the law of the wolf pack, and the law of the wolf pack is that when a younger and stronger rises, you must go down. Why should you be the camp-follower of a worn out idea? Why shouldn't you be captain of your own soul?"

He rose and looked down on her with a face suddenly drawn.

"Ye're upsettin' everything," he said almost harshly. "Ye're upsettin' me as well as the rest."

"That," she declared with a note of triumph in her voice, "is what I came for. Unrest is divine."

Her face was alight with the pleasure of her fancied triumph. She was smiling up at him and fondly imagining that she was changing him, too, bringing out what was finest in him, and her woman nature was very happy. He said nothing as his hands were clamped behind his back and his lips set against the flood of words which surged to them and clamored for outlet. He wanted to tell her of the wild unrest that had come into his soul, which had carried away in its swirling torrent the wreckage of all that had before been fixed and constant. He wanted to tell her that if she asked it, he would lay at her feet the ruins of his own deep loyalty to his people, and that for that weakness he hated himself bitterly. He wanted to tell her that his life would never again know the quiet of satisfaction because he loved a woman hopelessly, and since she chose to take him as a concrete example in her arguments he stood for a man as dissatisfied and wretched as any man could be; a man whose soul was crying for what it could never have.

But she chose to let him be her friend — and nothing more — so he must bite back those words, and finally when he was able to speak again he only repeated after her in a low voice, "Captain of my own soul!"

. . . . . .

A little before Christmas old Milt McBriar went to Lexington, and there he met a heavily bearded man in rough clothes who had arrived that morning from the West. They conferred in a cheap eating house which bears a ragged and unwholesome appearance, and which is kept by an exile from the mountains.

"Now, tell me, Milt," suggested Luke Thixton briefly, "what air this thing ye wants me ter do. I'm done with these hyar old flat lands thet they talks so much erbout."

But Milt McBriar's eyes had been vacantly watching the door. It was a glass door with its lower portion painted red and bearing in black letters the name of the proprietor.

"Damn!" he exclaimed violently, but under his breath.

"What's bitin' ye?" asked his companion as he bolted his food.

"I jest seed Breck Havey pass by that door," enlightened the chief. "But I reckon he couldn't hardly recognize you this fur back. I don't want no word of yore comin' ter go ahead of ye."

"What is it I'm a goin' back ter do?" insisted the exile doggedly.

"Oh," commented Milt McBriar, "we've got ter talk thet over at some length. Ye're a-goin' back ter git Anse Havey, but ye hain't a-goin' jest yit."

CHAPTER XXVI

NATURE is a profound old trickster, versed in every *nuance* of deceit with her children. Say to a woman, "Would you marry this man?" and straightway she would wither you with her scorn for the question.

Yet so long as the man understands that she is enthroned and pedestaled and that he looks up at her from the sweating hurly-burly of the ground level, she will consent to drift into dependence on his companionship and to take a place in his life which must always be a void without her.

As regularly as the sun went down in a wintry flare of sullen color and the stars came out, so regularly did Anse Havey set his face across the ridge at nightfall to sit there before Juanita's hearth and watch the carmine and lake and orange flecks that played on her cheek in the leaping of the blaze. She thought he was interested in her talk and arguments, but the man was really hardly conscious of them. He listened to her theories, hearing only the music of her voice and fought with her over abstract philosophies only to keep her interested so that he might watch her face and devour her with his eyes. Had he been the mastiff, Danny, lying on the hearth-rug and gazing up at her, he might have been equally absorbed in her mission. He would have loved her perhaps in something of the same way,

except that the dog might have let his honest eyes speak for him, and Anse was under the necessity of keeping a screen between his heart and his pupils. He, too, was a great, sinewy creature at whose growl others trembled, but who was willing for this woman to fetch and carry and remain mute. The arrogance he wielded as his right became humbleness with her, because she held over him love's tyranny of weakness over strength. Some day, he told himself, the control he had set on himself would slip and she would know how he felt — and then she would send him away. But as yet her serene eyes looked at him across the hearth where she had grown accustomed to seeing him, with no suspicion that he was a man with a tortured and aching heart. He was a welcome fixture there and the affection in her own eyes was as little like the passion of mating love as it might have been for the mastiff. It never occurred to her that she was putting an irremediable crimp into the soul of a man. To her it was a splendid and dependable comradeship and only that.

Sometimes she was the girl again and he the boy, and they laughed and were drawn closer by nonsensical things, such nonsensical things as make life tolerable when graver matters grow burdensome. But always when a new gun came to her rack she led him proudly to see it, and demanded obeisance from him as a conquering princess might have done. With the mock humility of a captive in the arena, the man would bend low and say, "We who are about to die salute thee!" But his mocking eyes showed no apprehension. He did not regret her success — could not regret it because it was hers.

But little Dawn, who at first had been accustomed to staying in the room when Anse Havey visited it, knew in her unfolding woman's heart what Juanita herself did not know, and she no longer remained to turn "company" into a "crowd."

Soon after his arrival she would rise and slip quietly out, though she went with no trace of the sullen jealousy she had felt for the Eastern man.

"Dawn," Juanita asked one day, "why don't you sit with us any more in the evenings? Don't you like Mr. Havey?"

The girl looked up and for a long time studied the face of her deity, then her eyes danced and her face broke into a smile.

"When two fellers comes to a cabin sparkin' the same gal on the same night," she said with unvarnished directness, "hit's the rule hyarabouts fer 'em to make her say which one she wants to stay — an' the other one goes home. I reckon it's the same thing with gals as with men. I reckon if we asked Anse Havey which one of us must go away it wouldn't take him long to make up his mind."

"Dawn!" exclaimed Juanita. "That's absurd. Anse Havey doesn't come here 'sparking,' as you call it. He simply comes as a friend. Why, I don't think of him in that other light any more than I do any other mountain man."

Between these two girls there had never been a note of friction or any lack of harmony, yet now the native-born flushed and her voice held a hint of hardness.

"What's the matter with Anse Havey? What's the

matter with mountain men?" she demanded quickly. "Ain't they good enough?"

"Good enough?" echoed Juanita. "Why, dear, if I didn't think he was good enough I wouldn't let him come here. But friendship is one thing and — well, the other is quite different. With us it's just friendship, and nothing can be better than true friendship."

Dawn laughed with a silvery peal that carried a trace of mockery and a wisdom that belied her seeming childishness.

"Sometimes a man or a woman is the only person that don't know what's in their own hearts," was her cryptic response.

But after having guarded himself all evening, and sometimes after having forgotten, in the pure delight of the present, that the future held only a blind alley for his life, Anse would tramp back to the brick house and on these long walks he would taste the dregs of the wine he had been drinking. Then he would realize starkly what a hopeless love means and would think of the days when she should be gone until he sickened at the desolation of the picture. It takes the plummet of a deep pain to reveal the depths of one's soul, and on these homeward journeys Bad Anse Havey was sounding his own.

Sometimes in sheer self-defense against the misery of such thoughts he would permit himself wild dreams as the logs died to embers on his own hearth, but always when he rose at dawn and looked out on the cold mists of the gaunt ridges he shook his head and set his teeth.

"I reckon I ain't hardly good enough," he would tell himself and as he would turn back to the dark room

with an almost despairing groan in his throat, his outstretched hands would seek the battered copy of Plutarch's Lives or Shakespeare's Tragedies. In a low voice he would confess brokenly, "I reckon, old friends, we'll have to get along together somehow. I reckon a man's just got ter be glad when he can, an' sad when he must."

For her part, when he had gone, Juanita would sit alone, studying the fire with her brow drawn in deep perplexity. She was reflecting on what Dawn had said.

"If I thought he misunderstood," she would tell herself, "I wouldn't let him come. It wouldn't be fair to him. That sort of thing between us would be ridiculous; it would spoil everything."

Then she would rise and shake her head and laugh.

"But of course he understands," she assured herself. "He said so himself. Dawn is only an ignorant child."

Always as she lay down in her bed after such musings this illogical postcript would steal into her thoughts.

"Besides, I can't send him away. I can't spare him: the loneliness would kill me."

One morning, as Anse sat over his breakfast at the kitchen table, his cousin, Breck Havey, rode up in hot haste to rouse him out of apathy and remind him that he must not shirk his rôle as leader of the clan.

The Havey from Peril came quickly to the point while the Havey of the backwoods listened. "I was down ter Lexin'ton yesterday an' as I was passin' Jim Freeman's dead-fall I happened ter look in. Thar war old Milt McBriar an' Luke Thixton with thar heads as clos't tergether as a pair of thieves. Luke hes done

come back from the West, an' I reckon ye kin figger out what thet means."

Anse grew suddenly rigid and his face blackened. So his destiny was crowding him.

"What air ye goin' ter do?" demanded Breck with a tone of anxious and impotent pleading, and Anse Havey shook his head.

"I don't know — quite yet," he said. "Let's see, is the High Co'te in session?"

Breck Havey nodded his head in perplexed assent. He wondered what the Court had to do with this exigency.

"All right. Tell Sidering to have the Grand Jury indict Luke for the McNash murder, an' Milt McBriar as accessory —"

"Good God, Anse!" burst out the other Havey. "Does ye realize what hell ye turns loose when ye tries ter drag Old Milt ter Co'te in Peril?"

"Yes, I know that. I'm not overlookin' nothin'." The answer was calm. "I'll give ye a list of witnesses. Tell Sidering to keep these true bills secret. I'll ride over an' testify myself, an' I'll 'tend to keepin' the witnesses quiet. I don't know whether we'll ever try these cases, but it's just as well to be ready along every line — and, Breck, don't let these tidings get to young Jeb until I tell him myself."

Breck Havey stood gazing down at the hearth with a troubled face. At last he hazarded remonstrance.

"Anse," he said, "I hain't never questioned ye. I've always took yore counsel. Ye're the head of the Haveys, but next to you I'm the man they harkens to

most. If any man has got ter dispute yer, I reckon ye'd take it most willin'ly from me."

"What is it, Breck? I'm plumb willin' to listen to your counsel."

"Then I'll talk outspoken. Ter try ter convict these men in Co'te means to take a desperate chance. Ye can't hardly succeed, an' if ye fails ye've lost yore hold on the Haveys — ye're plumb, eternally done for."

"I don't aim to fail."

"No; but ye mought. Anse, no man hain't never questioned yore loyalty till now. I mought as well tell ye straight what talkin's goin' round."

Anse stiffened. "What is it?" he demanded.

"Some folks 'low that ther Haveys don't mean as much ter ye now as ther furrin' school-teacher does. Them folks'll be pretty apt ter think ye ain't tryin' ter please them so much as her — if ye attempts this."

Anse stood for a long minute silent, and his bronzed features grew taut. At last he inquired coolly:

"What do *you* think, Breck?"

"I'd trust ye till hell froze."

"All right. Then do as I tells ye, an' if I fails I reckons *you'll* be head of the Haveys in my place."

Down at the school there was going to be a Christmas tree that year. Never before had the children of the branch-water folk heard of a Christmas tree. The season of Christ's birth had always been celebrated with moonshine jug and revolver. It was dreaded in advance and oftentimes mourned over in retrospect.

Now in many childish hearts large dreams were

brewing. Eager anticipations awaited the marvel. The honored young fir tree which was to bear a fruitage of gifts and lights had been singled out and marked to the axe. Anse Havey and Juanita had explored the woods together, bent on its selection. Perhaps Juanita and Dawn were as much excited as the children, but to Dawn it meant more than to anyone else. She was to accompany Juanita to Lexington to buy gifts and decorations, and would have her first wondrous glimpse of the lights and crowds of a city.

Milt was there at college and would be returning about the same time, so the mountain girl secretly wrote him of her coming. Now even facing so grave a crisis, Anse Havey thought of that tree and hoped that Luke would not come back before Christmas.

That night while he was sitting with Juanita and the fire was flashing on her cheeks from the logs he said moodily, "I'm afraid ye'll have to start despisin' me all over again."

She looked up in astonishment.

"Why?" she asked.

"I've got to kill a man," he announced briefly.

She rose from her chair and her face became pallid.

"Kill a man," she echoed.

"God knows I hate to do it." He, too, rose and stood before the hearth. "But, I reckon it had better be me than Jeb."

"Do you mean—" she broke off and finished brokenly—"that Fletch's murderer is back?"

"He's comin'. He's comin' to kill somebody else. . . . Most likely me. It's the question of choosin' between the life of a murderer that kilt Fletch

for a ticket West and a hundred dollars . . . or lettin' young Jeb McNash go crazy an' startin' the feud all over again. I reckon ye sees that I ain't got no choice."

She came nearer and stood confronting him so close that her low, tense voice came to his ears from a distance of only a few inches: "Suppose he kills you?"

"He'll have his chance," said Anse Havey shortly, "I ain't 'lowin' to shoot him down from ambush."

The girl leaned forward and clutched his hands in both her own. Under the tight pressure of her fingers he felt every nerve in his body tingle and leap into a hot ecstasy of emotion while his face became white and drawn.

"Don't risk your life, Anse," she pleaded. "Your people can't spare you, I can't spare you. Not now, Anse, I need you too much."

The man's response came in a hoarse whisper of eager questioning.

"Ye needs *me?*"

"Yes, yes," she swept on, and for an instant he was on the verge of withdrawing his hands and crushing her to him, but something in his face had warned her. . . . She dropped the hands she had been holding and said in an altered tone, "It's not just me, it's bigger than that. It's my work. We've come to be such good friends that I couldn't go on without you. My work would fail."

For a while he was silent; then he said very slowly and very bitterly, "Oh, it's just your work that needs me?"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

He shook his head. "I don't hardly know whether I understands ye or not," he said, "but I'm kinder afraid I do."

He had been so close to the brink; had fancied for an intoxicated moment that he saw such gates of Miracle opening, that now he felt too dead to argue. He turned away, fearing that she would read his face.

"I reckon," he said dully, "Luke won't hardly kill me."

Suddenly an idea leaped into the girl's brain and she demanded, "Anse, you can prove this man's guilt, can't you? He ought to die. Civilization would be as inflexible about that as feud vengeance. Why not give him a legal trial? You could convict him."

Bad Anse Havey smiled, but with mirthless irony.

"I can prove it, I reckon, to the satisfaction of a Jury drawn from my own country," he said, "takin' its orders from me."

"Then," swept on the girl, "why not do that? Instead of murder that would be justice. Instead of breaking the law it would be setting a precedent for law."

"As to it's bein' murder," he commented drily, "I don't see much difference whether I shoot him down and end it, or whether I go through the form of havin' twelve men sit and pretend to listen to evidence an' then hang him."

"Try it," she pleaded. "Try it because I ask you. You've said that if you could accomplish the same ends lawfully, you would rather do it. Now prove it to me."

Anse Havey made no immediate reply. He went to

the door and opened it to let the cold air blow for a time on his face. When he came back and stood before her his features were all set and mask-like and he spoke with a voice that he held to a dead level.

"I'm goin' to do what ye asks. I've done took steps to that end already, because I knew ye would ask it," he said. "But I ain't goin' to lie about it. I ain't doin' it from no motive of civilization. It's just hypocrisy to use a Court of law like you'd use a gun. If ye can delude yourself into thinkin' that forms of right an' wrong make right an' wrong I can't. I'm doin' it just because ye asks it. I ain't doin' it in the interest of your work neither." For a moment the voice got away from him and rose fiercely.

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's *you* I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his blazing eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quietly enough now.

"If I fails to hang Luke Thixton, I'll be right now what ye prophesied for me twenty years hence; the leader of the wolf pack that goes down an' gets trampled on an' torn to pieces. I ain't never put no such strain on my influence as this is goin' to be. I've got to hold back the Haveys an' the McBriars whilst this Court foolishness dawdles along, an' if I falls down, Jeb is goin' to kill Luke anyway. I'm doin' this because ye asks it an' fer that reason only, an' now I'll say goodnight to ye."

Juanita Holland stood looking at the door he had closed behind him, a wild sense of tumult and uneasiness in her heart.

"'That's the sort of friend I am,'" she repeated to herself.

What did he mean? For a moment she wanted to rush out and call him back. Was Dawn right, after all, and had he trodden underfoot the one possible basis of safe friendship to which he had pledged himself?

No, she argued with the sophistry of refusing to believe what she did not wish to believe, it was simply the old clash of view-point and will — the old duel of personalities, and lay quite apart from any question of their personal relations.

CHAPTER XXVII

THERE still remained the task of winning young Jeb's assent to this plan, and Anse Havey foresaw a stubborn battle there. Jeb had been reading law that winter by the light of a log fire through long and lonely evenings in a smoke-darkened cabin.

When Anse Havey called from the stile one night, the boy laid a battered Blackstone on his thin knee and called out, "Come in, Anse, and pull up a cheer." Anse had been rehearsing his arguments as he rode through the sleet-lashed hills and he was deeply troubled. In the hill parlance, "Thar was big trouble brewin'," and very vitally was young Jeb "in the b'ilin'."

The man and the boy sat on either side of the fireplace as the sleet pelted endlessly and monotonously on the slabs of the roof. Penetrating gusts swept in at the broken chinking and up through the warped floor until old Bear-dog, lying at their feet, shivered as he slept with his forepaws stretched on the hearth and the two men hitched their chairs nearer to the blaze. By the bed still stood the rifle that had been Fletch's; the rifle upon which the boy's eyes always fell and which to him was the symbol of his duty.

As Bad Anse Havey talked of the future with all the instinctive forcefulness that he could command, the boy's set face relaxed and into his eyes came a glint

of eagerness, because he himself was to play no mean part in these affairs.

Into his heart crept the first burning of ambition, the first reaching out after a career. He saw a future opening before him and his grave eyes were drinking in pictures which he alone saw in the live embers.

Then when ambition had been kindled and fanned into blaze the elder man broached the topic which was the crux of his plea.

"The man that can do things for the mountains must be willin' to make a heap of sacrifices, Jeb," he began.

Jeb laughed, looking about the bare room of his cabin. "Mek sacrifices?" he said. "I hain't never knowed nothin' else but thet. I reckon I hain't skeered of sacrifices!"

"I didn't mean that way, Jeb." Anse spoke slowly, holding the boy with his eyes, and some premonition of his meaning struck in so that the lad's lean face again hardened. The lines that had come around his mouth in these last months traced themselves stiffly like parentheses about his lips. His eyes turned to the gun and he shook his head.

"Nothin' kaint stand betwixt me an' what I've got ter do, Anse," he said slowly. He did not speak now with wild passion, but calm finality. "I've done took ther oath."

For a while Anse Havey did not speak. At last he said quietly, "I reckon ye've got rid of the idea that I was aimin' to deceive ye, Jeb. I told ye that when Fletch's assassin came back to the mountains, I'd let ye know. I'm goin' to keep my word."

Jeb rose suddenly from his chair and stood with the fire lighting up his ragged trousers and the frayed sleeves of his coat.

"Air he back now?" he inquired.

Anse shook his head.

"Not yet, Jeb, but he's coming." He saw the twitch that came and went across the tight-closed lips which made no comment.

"Jeb," he continued, "I want ye to help me. I want ye to be big enough to put by things that it's hard to put by."

The boy once more shook his head. "Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me ter do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me *thet*, cause ef ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light while the shadows danced and swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment and he spoke as though unwilling to utter such treasonable words.

"I reckon, Anse," he suggested, "ye wouldn't hardly hev asked a thing like thet afore —" there was a hesitating halt before he went on —"afore a furrin woman changed yore fashion of lookin' at things."

Anse Havey felt his face redden and an angry retort rose to his lips. But the charge was true and he suddenly wondered how many others of his people through

the hills were saying the same thing about him: whether his power was weakening.

He went on as though Jeb had not spoken.

"All I ask is that when that man comes ye'll hold your hand until the Court has acted."

"Does ye reckon Milt McBriar aims ter let Sidering try kin of his'n atter what happened afore?" was the next incredulous question.

Anse Havey's voice broke out of quiet and Anse Havey's eyes woke to a fire that was convincing.

"By God, *I* aims ter have him do it! I ain't askin' leave of Milt McBriar." Then he added, "I aims to hang the man that kilt your daddy in the jail-house yard at Peril, an' if the McBriars get him they've got to kill me first. Will you hold your hand till I'm through?"

The boy stood there, his hands slowly twitching and opening. Finally he said, "Hit ain't a-goin' ter satisfy me ter penitentiary thet feller. He's got ter die."

"He's goin' to die. If I fail, then —" the clansman raised his hands in a gesture of concession —"then he's yours. Will you wait?"

"I don't hardly believe," said Jeb McNash with conviction, "any man livin' kin keep Milt's hired assassin in no jail-house long enough ter try him an' hang him. But I'm willing ter see. I'll hold my hand thet long, Anse, but —" Once more a spasmodic tautening of muscles convulsed the boy's frame, and his voice took on its excited note of shrillness. "But I warns ye, I'm goin' ter be settin' thar in ther High Co'te. I hain't never a-goin' ter leave hit, an' ef thet Jury clars him — or ef they jest penitentiaries him, I'm going ter

kill him as he sets thar in his cheer — so help me God!"

Loyal in their stubborn adherence to feud leadership, the Judge and Grand Jury secretly returned two indictments bearing the names of Luke Thixton as principal and Milton McBriar, Sr., as accessory to the crime of murder "against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and contrary to the statute in such case made and provided." Also they withheld their action from public announcement.

Surreptitiously and guardedly a message traveled up the water courses to the remotest Havey cabin. Bad Anse bade his men be ready to rise in instant response to his call, and they made ready to obey.

One day Juanita Holland and Dawn set out for Lexington to do their Christmas shopping.

Anse Havey rode with them across to Peril and waved his hat in farewell as they stood on the vestibule of the rickety passenger coach. It was a very shabby car of worn and faded plush, but to Dawn it was a fairy chariot.

As she sat by the window and looked out, saying little and repressing with mountain reserve all the gasps of delight and astonishment that came bubbling up from her heart, Juanita smiled with a glow in her own veins. The parted lips and sparkling eyes of her first and most beloved protégée, were lips and eyes joyously drinking in a panorama of wonder, seeing the great world of which she had only dreamed. At last the foot-hills fell behind and a country spread out where the trees grew far apart in smooth lawns, and now she was in the promised

land that her ancestors had missed; in the rich culture of the Bluegrass.

About her were the marvels of mansions and metaled roads; white instead of clay-red. But while her heart thumped with the wonder of it all she bore herself, because of her mountain blood, with no outward show of surprise and looked at each new thing as though she had known it from her birth.

As they entered the lobby of the Phœnix Hotel in Lexington a tall youth rose from a chair and came forward. If the boy was cruder and darker and less trim in appearance than his Bluegrass brethren, at least he bore his head as high and walked as independently. He came forward with his hat in his hand and his voice was enthusiastic, "I'm mighty glad ter see ye, Dawn."

The girl looked about the place and breathed rather than said, "Isn't the world wonderful, Milt?"

Two days followed through which Dawn passed in transports of delight. There were the undreamed sights of shop windows decked for the holiday season and the crowds on the streets, and the gayety and merriment of Christmas everywhere. She had never heard so much laughter before and she found it infectious and laughed, too.

Young Milt way-laid her in a dozen shops and the sight of him coaxed a brighter color into her cheeks despite her gay dismissals. "Go on away, boy," she would tell him. "Don't you see I'm too busy to be bothered with you?"

Once he whispered, as he stood at her elbow in the crush of a toy store, "I hain't a-goin' ter be much as-

tonished ef old Santa Claus puts somethin' on thet tree fer you, Dawn. I met up with him just now an' he named hit ter me."

At last she found herself again in a faded plush car beside Juanita with young Milt sitting opposite. In the racks overhead and piled about them was a mysterious litter of gayly tied packages.

Of course they had much more than their two pairs of saddle-bags could carry, but young Milt would help them and Anse Havey would be at the train to meet them. Old Milt, too, was on that train, but he paused only to nod before disappearing into the shabbier smoking compartment where he had business to discuss. A man was waiting for him in there whom old acquaintances might have passed by without recognition. It was the devout hope of Milt McBriar that when they left the train at Peril, any acquaintances who might be lounging about would so fail to recognize him.

Luke Thixton bore an altered appearance. Always he had been ragged and unkempt of person. His black beard had ambushed his features until save for cheek-bones and nose and eyes, men had forgotten what the face itself was like. His hair had always fallen long and straggly under the brim of his hat.

But now he had been shaved and his hair was closely cropped. He wore a suit of new clothes that came near to fitting him. A disguise of cleanliness enveloped him.

While the Christmas shoppers laughed in the day coach, Luke received final instructions in the empty smoker.

He was to pass as swiftly and unobtrusively as possible through Peril and go direct across the ridge.

He and Milt would leave the train without conversation or anything to mark them as companions. After that Luke knew what he was to do, and no further conference would be necessary until he came to report success and collect his wage.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was noon when the train rumbled again over the trestle near the town and all morning a steady, feathery snow had been falling, veiling the sights from the car windows and wrapping the mountains in a cloak of swan's-down.

At last the trucks screamed, the old engine came puffing and wheezing to a tired halt and the two girls with young Milt at their heels made their way out, burdened with parcels.

On the cinder platform Juanita looked about for Anse Havey and she saw him standing in a group with Jeb and several other men whom she did not know — but Anse's face was not turned toward her, and it did not wear the look of expectancy that the thought of her usually brought there. Jeb's countenance, too, was white and very set, and a breathless tensity seemed to hold the whole picture in fixed tautness.

There were several clumps of men standing about, all armed, and every face wore the same expression of waiting sternness.

A gasp of premonition rose to Juanita's lips as she caught the sinister note of suspense with which the atmosphere was freighted. Then Milt McBriar stepped down from the smoker vestibule, followed by another man.

As the two of them turned in opposite directions on

the trampled snow of the platform, a man who had been standing with Bad Anse Havey laid his hand heavily on the shoulder of the clean-shaven arrival, and said in a clear voice, "Luke Thixton, I want ye fer ther murder of Fletch McNash." So that was what it all meant!

Old Milt McBriar, for once startled out of his case-hardened self-control, wheeled to demand angrily, "What hell's trick is this?" His eyes were blazing and his face worked with passionate fury.

A second Deputy answered him. "An' Milt McBriar I wants *you*, too, on an indictment for accessory ter murder."

Juanita felt Dawn's spasmodic fingers clutching her arm and felt her own knees grow suddenly weak. She heard a soft clatter of parcels on the snow-wrapped cinders as young Milt dropped them and leaped forward, his own eyes kindling, and his right hand frantically clawing at the buttons of his coat. But before young Milt could draw his weapon from its arm-pit holster, Jeb McNash had wheeled to face him, bending forward to a half crouch. The younger McBriar halted and bent back under the glint of the revolver which Jeb was thrusting into his face.

Haveys, armed and grim of visage, began drawing close about the captives in a menacing cordon.

Dawn clung with bloodless lips and white cheeks to the elder girl as she watched her brother holding his weapon in the face of the boy whom she suddenly realized she loved more than her brother.

Then the Sheriff spoke again. "Thar hain't no use in makin' no trouble, Milt. Ther Grand Jury hes done

acted an' I reckon ye'd better let ther law take its course."

"Why don't ye take me, too?" demanded the heir to clan leadership in a tense, passionate voice. "I'm a McBriar. That's all ye've got against any of these men."

"Ther Grand Jury didn't indict ye, son," responded the Sheriff calmly.

Then the older McBriar became suddenly quiet again and self-possessed. He turned to his boy.

"Milt," he said sternly, "*you* keep outen this. Thar's other work for ye. You ride over home an' tell every man that calls hisself a McBriar —" his voice suddenly rose in the defiant crescendo of a trapped lion —"tell every man that calls hisself a McBriar, thet ther Haveys hev got me in their damned jail-house — an' ask 'em how long they aims ter let me lay thar."

Young Milt turned and went at a run toward the livery stable. Over his shoulder as he went he flung back at Jeb, who stood looking after him with lowered pistol, "I'm goin' now, but I'll be back ter hev a reckonin' with ye!"

And Jeb shouted, too: "Ye kain't come back none too soon, Milt. I'll be hyar when ye comes."

Then the group started on its tramp toward the Court-house and the little jail that lay at its side.

Juanita suddenly realized that she and Dawn were standing as if rooted there. The older girl heard an inarticulate moan break from the lips of the younger, and then as though waking out of sleep she looked absently down at a litter of beribboned parcels which lay about her feet. That message which Old Milt had flung

back to his people on the lips of his son, would send tumbling to arms every man who could carry a rifle.

And the Haveys were grimly waiting for them. The Haveys were already here. The two girls could not ride across the ridge now. They could only sit in their room at the wretched hotel and wait.

Juanita was glad that little Dawn could cry. She couldn't. She could only look ahead and see a procession of hideous possibilities.

It had been a few minutes after noon when Young Milt had rushed into the livery stable and ordered his horse. In that one instant all his college influences had dropped away from him, and he was following the fierce single star of clan loyalty. His father who had never been any man's captive was back there in the vermin-infested little "jail-house." And when Young Milt came back, the one Havey clansman he had marked for his own would be the boy under whose pistol muzzle he had been forced to give back — young Jeb McNash.

The stroke had taken the McBriars completely by surprise. The boy must reach his own territory and rally them to their fullest numbers even from the remotest coves. This battle was to be fought in the enemy's own stronghold and against a force which was ready to the last note of preparedness.

So nothing could happen until to-morrow. Nothing would happen in all likelihood until the day after that, and meanwhile the two girls in the hotel must sit there thinking.

The little town itself lay dismal and helpless with its shacks scattered over its broken and uneven levels.

Here and there a shaggy-coated horse shivered at a hitching rack; here and there men, in twos and threes, stood scowling. On the chocolate-colored mountains the snow was still spitting.

Dawn perhaps found it hardest, for in this one day Dawn had grown up, and to-morrow would bring the boy whom she now confessed loving, though she confessed it with self-contempt, leading a force to meet that of her own people, and at the front of her own people was her brother, fighting to avenge her father. Juanita, whose eyes could not escape ironical reminders when she glanced down at the Christmas packages, seemed to hear over and over the voice of Anse Havey saying, "I'm doin' it because ye asks it."

She had sought to avert an assassination and it seemed that the effort would precipitate a holocaust.

Anse was very busy, but he found time to come to her that afternoon. In the bare little hotel lobby the firelight glinted on a number of rifles as their owners lounged about the fire.

And in Anse she saw once more the stern side. His face was unsmiling and in his eyes was that expression which made her realize how inflexibly he would set about the accomplishment of the thing he had undertaken, but as he spoke to her a sudden softness came into his pupils.

"God knows I'm sorry," he said, "that this thing broke just now. I didn't aim that ye should be no eye-witness."

Juanita smiled rather wanly. Old Milt, he told her, would soon be released. "We ain't even goin' to keep

him in the jail-house no longer than mornin'. We couldn't convict him an' it would only bring on more trouble."

"Why was he arrested, then?" she asked blankly.

"Just to keep him out of mischief over night," he smiled. "Even the law can be used for strategy."

"What will happen when the McBriars come back?" she demanded in a shaken voice.

He shook his head. "I can't hardly tell ye that. I'd like right well to know myself."

But the next morning, Anse Havey came again and cautioned the two women not to leave their rooms and not to keep their shutters open. All that day the town lay like a turtle tight drawn into its shell. Streets became empty. Doors were locked and shutters barred. But toward evening, to the girl's bewilderment, she saw Haveys riding out of town instead of into it. Soon there were no more horses at the racks. By night the place which was to be assaulted to-morrow seemed to have been abandoned by its defenders.

Old Milt McBriar had been liberated and had ridden out in the morning, boiling with wrath, to meet the horsemen who were hurrying in. The figure of Bad Anse Havey she saw often from her window when, in disobedience to her orders, she looked out, but for the most part the force of his clansmen had evaporated.

Then came another wretched night and with the second forenoon the snow-wrapped town settled down to the empty silence of a cemetery, but with early afternoon the new procession began to arrive. A long and continuous stream of McBriar horsemen, each armed to the teeth, rode past the hotel and went straight to the

Court-house. The girl had seen Anse Havey alone, and seemingly unarmed, going that same way an hour before.

A wild alarm seized her. Where were all the Havey forces now? Was Anse trying to hold his prisoner alone against his enemies? Had all his clan deserted him? Was he already the discarded leader of his wolf-pack? The girl sat down to wait. She was very faint and it seemed to her that she sat there for eternity and all she saw was a spot on the wall where the flaking and dirty paper had been patched.

Slowly a shaft of pale light came through the window at a low angle. The sun was sinking through the yellow ghost of a glow. Then she heard again the sound which she had heard on her first night in the mountains, only now it came from a hundred throats.

It was the McBriar yell and after it came a scattering sequence of rifle and pistol shots. The clan was going away again, and shooting up the town as they went, but what had happened down there at the jail and Court-house? The girl rose to her feet and clasped her hands to her lips to stifle a scream.

CHAPTER XXIX

LATER she heard the story. The McBriars had come expecting battle. They had found every road open, and the town delivered over to their mercy! For a time they had gone about looking for trouble, and finding no one to oppose them. Then Old Milt and his son had ridden to the Court-house to demand the keys of the jail. They discovered Judge Sidering sitting in the little office which adjoined his court-room, and with him, entirely unarmed and without escort, sat Bad Anse Havey. When the two McBriars, backed by a score of armed men, broke fiercely into the room, others massed at their backs, crowding doorway and hall.

Judge Sidering greeted his visitors as though no intimation had ever reached him that they were coming with a grievance.

"Come in, Milt, and have a chair," he invited.

"Cheer, hell!" shouted Milt McBriar. "Give me the keys ter thet jail-house an' give 'em ter me quick."

Opening the drawer of his desk as if he had been asked for a match, Judge Sidering took out the big iron key to the outer door and the smaller brass key to the little row of cells. He tossed the two across to Milt in a matter-of-fact fashion.

Five minutes later the McBriar chief was back, trembling with rage. He had found the jail empty.

"If you're lookin' for Luke Thixton, Milt," enlightened the Judge calmly, "the High Sheriff took him to Louisville yesterday for safe-keepin'."

The answer was a bellow of rage. Old Milt McBriar threw forward his rifle.

Then Anse looked up and spoke slowly, "I reckon it wouldn't profit ye much to harm us, Milt. We ain't armed an' it would bring on a heap of trouble."

Outside rose an angry chorus of voices. The news that the jail was empty was going through the crowd.

For a time the McBriar stood there, debating his next step. The town seemed at his mercy. Seemed! That word gave him pause. The way home lay through Havey territory which might mean twenty ragged miles of solid ambush. Anse Havey sat too quietly for Milt's ease of mind. Was he baiting some fresh trap? It was not like Anse Havey to place himself in an enemy's hands with no recourse planned for the next step.

The old intriguer felt baffled and at sea. He had grown accustomed to weighing and calculating with guileful deliberation. He balked at swift and instinctive action. Moreover, if he debated long, he might not be able to control his men. He inquiringly looked up — to Little Milt, who was fighting back the crowd at the door and locking them outside. Beyond the panels could be heard loud swearing and the impatient shuffling of many feet.

"What shall we do, son?" inquired the older man of the younger. His voice held a note of appeal and breaking power.

When young Milt had ridden out of Peril no feudist in the hills had borne a heart fuller of hatred and hunger

for vengeance, but that was because of his father. Now his father was free. For Luke Thixton he had a profound contempt. He saw in the situation only a game of wits in which Anse Havey was winner.

"Well," he said, with a grin which he could not repress, "hit looks right smart ter me like thar hain't nothin' to do but ride on back home an' try again next time."

"Ride home an' leave things standin'?" demurred the father blankly. Already he was reaching the period of his stormy life where he was very weary of having to settle every question for himself. He wanted to be able to lean a little on the judgment of someone else.

Young Milt seemed quite philosophical: "I don't hardly reckon we kin take him outen ther Looeyville jail-house, kin we? I reckon they've got ter fotch him back hyar *sometime*. Let's just bide our time." And in the end the counsel of the younger generation prevailed.

Outside there had been a short, sharp struggle with a mutinous spirit. These men had come for action and they did not want to ride back foiled, but the word of Old Milt had stood unchallenged too long to collapse suddenly. Yet he led back a grumbling following and bore a discounted power. They could not forget that a Havey had worsted him.

So the spirit of the men who had come to fight vented itself in yells and random volleys to which there was no reply, and again a train of horsemen were on their way into the hills. When it was all over and Juanita sat there in her empty school she was realizing that after all the desperate moment had only been deferred and

must come again with absolute certainty. Christmas was only two days off and her gun-rack was empty. When she had come home there had not been a single weapon there.

There would be no Christmas tree now! The beribboned packages lay in a useless pile. Had school been ostensibly in session, she knew that the desks would have been as empty as the gun-rack. The whole turtle-like life had drawn in its head and the countryside lay as though besieged.

On Anse Havey's book-shelves were a few new volumes, for Juanita was feeding his scant supply of literature, and a softer type of poetry was being added to his frugal and stern repertoire. A number of men left the mountains and went into exile elsewhere. These were the witnesses who must testify against Luke Thixton and whose lives would not have been worth counterfeit money had they remained at home.

Then came Christmas Day itself, black and soggy with the thaw that had set in and a moody dreariness in the sky. The sun seemed to have despaired and made his course spiritlessly from dawn to twilight, crawling dimly across his daily arc.

Brother Anse Talbott came over to the school and found both women sitting apathetically by an untrimmed fir tree, amid a litter of forgotten packages. The children of Tribulation were having the sort of Christmas they had always had — a day of terror and empty cheerlessness.

"Hit seems like a right-smart pity fer them little shavers ter be plumb teetotally disapp'inted," mused the old preacher reflectively. "'Spose now ye put names

on them gew-gaws an' let me jest sorter ride round an' scatter 'em."

"You dear old Saint!" cried Juanita, suddenly roused out of her apathy. "But you'll freeze to death or get drowned in some ford."

"Thet's all right," he answered briefly. "I reckon I kin go ther route."

It took Good Anse Talbott three days of battle with quicksand and mire to finish that mission. But for three days he grimly rode torrent-flushed trails, the one man who could go unchallenged alike to the houses of McBriars and Haveys. Impartially the ragged and drab-colored Christmas Saint crossed and recrossed the line which was now a dead-line, pausing to leave cheering trinkets under many dark roofs, and smiling in his bushy beard as he carried away the remembrance of childish smiles. And because at each house he told them that Juanita Holland had sent him, the girl was canonized afresh in hearts, old and young, back in roadless coves and on bleak hillsides.

Once on Christmas Day, Juanita spoke of young Milt and she saw Dawn's face change, from tear-stained distress to hard bitterness.

"I wonder when he's going back to Lexington?" suggested the older girl, and the younger, unconsciously lapsing into dialect, flashed quickly at her. "Don't never name him ter me. I hates him! He's a McBriar!"

Later in the day as they stood in the sodden air by the fence young Milt himself rode by and started to draw rein. He slipped one hand into a pocket which

was bulging with some sort of package, but Dawn, though her eyes met his in direct gaze, raised her chin and looked through him as though he had no existence.

For an instant the boy's lips moved as if to speak, then they tightened and without a word he rode on, his shoulders stiff and his own head as high as the girl's had been.

That night, though, when the lad sat moodily in his own room, his hand slipped once more into his pocket. Slowly it came out, bearing a small box. Inside was a gold locket that he had bought in Lexington and a slender gold chain to support it. He turned the thing over in his hand and looked at it, then he rose and went out of the house and down to the slowly freezing creek and tossed the thing into the inky water.

Every evening found Anse Havey seated before Juanita's hearth, studying the flicker of the firelight on her face. Every detail of her expression, became to him as something he had always known and worshiped — the little troubled furrow between her brows, the changefulness of her eyes through a varied scale of blue — each of them to his thinking more beautiful than the others — the exquisite chiseling of her lips and the crisp tendril-like curl of the hair on her forehead and neck; these were all things that he saw again when he was alone.

Some day Malcolm would come back and marry her and then — at that point Bad Anse Havey refused to follow his trend of thought further. He only ground

his teeth. "Ye damn fool," he told himself, "that ain't no reason why ye shouldn't make the most of to-day. She's right here now, an' she's sun an' moon an' starshine an' music an' sweetness."

She did not know, and he gave her no hint, that in these times, with plots and counter-plots hatching on both sides of the ridge he never made that journey in the night without inviting death. He was walking miles through black woodland trails each evening to relieve for an hour or two her loneliness, and to worship with sealed lips and a rebellious heart.

She accepted his tribute as a thing taken for granted, never looking deep enough into his eyes to read the depth of pain which they mirrored. It was a comfort to have him there, even if for an hour at a time she would seem to forget his presence and gaze at the embers with eyes that told of thoughts wandering far away; and since that was all he could have he accounted it well worth its cost in risk and weariness and made no complaint.

One night as he turned from the hill trail into the road a rifle shot rang out and he heard the zip of a bullet in the naked brush at his back. With ingrained caution he sank out of sight and crouched listening, but his lips broke into a contemptuous smile as the wild shout from the darkness told him that it was only a drunken rider in the night. That, too, he did not mention.

On the night before he was to go to Peril to attend the trial of Luke Thixton, he came with a very full and heavy heart. He knew that it might be a farewell. To-morrow he must put to the touch all his hold on his people and all his audacity of resolution. He stood

at the verge of an Austerlitz or a Waterloo, and he had undertaken the thing for no reason except that it had pleased her to command it.

He knew that among his own followers there were smiles for the power with which a foreign woman had enmeshed his independence, and if one failure marred his plans those smiles would become derisive. It was weakness to go on as he was going, gazing dumbly at her with boundless adoration that he dared not voice. To-night he would bluntly tell her that he was doing these things because he loved her; that while he was glad to do them, he could not let her go on blindly misunderstanding his motives. He feared, and the thought galled him with self-contempt, that to please her he would throw down his whole régime in ruins before her and let her walk over his own body lying across it. But she must know, too, that that disloyalty to his people and mission had cost him his self-respect. So he would tell her that he loved her hopelessly and would not see her again.

But when he reached the school she rose to receive him and he could see only the slimness of her graceful figure and the smile of welcome on her lips, and the man who had never been recreant before to the mandate of resolution became tongue-tied.

She held out a hand which he took with more in his grip than the clasp of friendship, but that she did not, or would not, notice.

"Anse," she laughed, "I've had a letter from home to-day, urging me to give it all up and come back. They don't realize how splendidly I am going to succeed, thanks to your help. I want you to go with me soon

and mark some more trees for felling. It won't be long now before they can begin building again."

"I wonder," he said, looking at her with brows that were deeply drawn and eyes full of suffering, "if ye'll ever have time to stop talkin' about the school for a little spell an' remember that I'm a human bein'."

"Remember that you're a human being?" she questioned in perplexity.

She stood there with one hand on the back of her chair and her face puzzled. He decided at once that that expression was the most beautiful she had ever worn, and he sturdily held that conviction until her eyes changed to laughter, when he foreswore his allegiance to the first fascination for the second.

"Are you sure you *are* a human being?" she teased. "When you wear that sulky face you are only half human. I ought to make you stand in the corner until you can be cheerful."

"I reckon," he said a little bitterly, "if ye ordered me to stand in the corner I'd just about do it. I reckon that's about how much manhood I've got left."

But he, too, laughed in the next moment. It pleased her Majesty this evening to be a capricious child and how can a man talk sternly with a beautiful child? He, who was to-morrow to imperil his whole future in obedience to her wish, sat silent, gazing at her and totally unable to say the things he had meant to say.

After a while she picked up a sewing basket and drew from it some filmy and gossamer thing, Anse Havey did not know what. He felt vaguely that it was some detail of woman's gear, belonging to the world of dainty things with which he had no familiarity.

For a long while she plied her needle, her slender fingers moving in quick, graceful little gestures and her brow bent over her work. She was an exquisite picture. Her profile; the neck that rose so splendidly from her straight shoulders, the fingers that flashed back and forth and the slender foot that rested on the hearth; all these proclaimed her almost exotic refinement and aristocracy.

Anse Havey cast a glance down at his own mud-splashed boots and coarse clothing — he the leader of the wolf-pack! A great pain of contrast and remoteness seized him, and a passionate hunger gnawed at his heart. The far-away look came again to her eyes and he knew that he was for the moment forgotten; that between them lay measureless distances, and that she was living in a world to which he was a stranger. At last he rose.

"I reckon I'll be goin'," he said bluntly; "I've got to start for Peril at sun-up."

"What's going on at Peril?" she absently inquired.

"They're goin' to try Luke Thixton."

At that the far-away look left her face and for an instant again the man saw that panic in her eyes, which made him hope that she did care something.

"Anse," she pleaded, "take care of yourself . . . I shall be so horribly anxious . . ."

He found himself taking a quick step forward. Now he would tell her. He would break his silence and make a clean breast of it.

"Why will ye be anxious?" he demanded harshly. "What diff'rence would it make?"

"You are my very best friend, and I can't spare

you," she said innocently. "Wouldn't it make a difference to you if I were in danger?"

What could a man say to such artless ignorance and blindness of true conditions? He brought his teeth together with a grating clamp. Once more she had made him helpless by a note of appeal, and once more he was silent.

"I reckon I won't be in much danger to-morrow," he said, "but it would be a God's blessin' if I was dead."

These swift changes of mood were part of his mountain nature, she told herself, where storms come quickly and go quickly. Such outbursts she ignored.

The morning of the trial dawned on a town prepared to face a bloody day. Long before train-time crowds had drifted down to the station.

As though by common consent the McBriars stood on one side of the track and the Haveys on the other.

For an hour they massed there, lowering of face, yet quietly waiting. The time had not yet come to grapple. Then the whistle shrieked across the river and each crowd came a little forward, with hands tightened on rifles, awaiting the supreme moment. The Deputy Sheriffs came out of the depot and stood waiting between the two crowds with a strained assumption of unconcern. But when the train arrived it carried an extra coach and at sight of it the McBriars groaned and knew once more they were defeated.

They had come to wrest a prisoner from a Sheriff's posse and encountered trained soldiery. Behind the opened sashes of the coach they saw a solid mass of blue overcoats and brown service hats. Every window

bristled with rifle barrels and fixed bayonets. Then while the train was held beyond its usual brief stop, and while those rifle barrels were trained impartially on Haveys and McBriars, a line of soldiers began pouring out into the road-bed and forming cordons along each side of the track. Both lines moved slowly, but unwaveringly forward, pressing back the crowds before their urgent bayonets.

Two wicked-looking Gatling guns were unloaded from the baggage car, and, tending them as men might handle beloved pets, came squads whose capes were faced with artillery red.

Shortly a compact little procession in column of fours with the Gatling guns at its front and a hollow square at its center was marching briskly to the Court-house. In the hollow square went the defendant, handcuffed to the Sheriff. Without delay or confusion the Gatling guns were put in place, one commanding the Court-house Square and one casting its many-eyed glance up the hillside at the back.

Then with the bayonets of sentries crossed at the doors the bell in the cupola rang while Judge Sidering walked calmly into the building and instructed the Sheriff to open Court.

His Honor had directed that, save officials, every man who sought admission, should be disarmed at the door.

Luke Thixton bent forward in his chair and growled into the ear of Old Milt McBriar who sat at his left:

"I've got as much chanst hyar as a fish on a hill top. Hain't ye goin' ter do nothin' fer me?" And Milt looked about helplessly and swore under his breath.

One on-looker there had not been searched. Young

Jeb McNash bore the credentials of a special Deputy Sheriff and under his coat was a holster with its flap unbuttoned. While the panel was being selected; while lawyers wrangled and witnesses testified; while the Court gazed off with half-closed eyes, rousing out of seeming drowsiness only to overrule or sustain a motion, young Jeb sat with his arms on the table, and never did his eyes leave the face of the accused.

CHAPTER XXX

IT was a very expeditious trial.

Judge Sidering glanced at the faces of Old Milt and young Jeb and had no desire to prolong the agony of those hours. The defense half-heartedly relied upon the old device of a false alibi which the State promptly punctured and riddled. Even the lawyers seemed in haste to be through and set a voluntary limit on their arguments.

At the end His Honor read brief instructions and the panel was locked in its room.

Then the McBriars drew a little closer around the chair where Old Milt waited and the militia captain strengthened his guard outside and began unostentatiously sprinkling uniformed men through the dingy court-room until the hodden-gray throng was flecked with blue.

The lawyers rose and stretched their arms and stood chatting and chewing tobacco about the rusty stove. Milt McBriar and the accused whispered together, wearing faces devoid of expression, but through and over this affectation of the casual, brooded the spirit of the portentous.

The militia officers who stood charged with the duty of curbing these dangerous potentialities made no attempt to conceal their anxious earnestness, and Jeb Mc-

Nash in whose eyes dwelt the fierce intentness of a cat at a mouse-hole was not dissembling either.

At length there came a rap on the door of the jury-room and instantly the low drone of voices fell to a hush. His Honor poured a glass of water from the chipped pitcher at his elbow while Luke Thixton and Milt McBriar, for all their forced immobility of feature, stiffly braced themselves. Like some restless animal of many legs the rough throng along the court-room benches scraped its feet on the floor.

Young Jeb shifted his chair a few inches so that the figure of the defendant might be in an uninterrupted line of vision. He leaned far forward with his eyes riveted on the face of the man he hated. His right hand quietly slipped under his coat, and his fingers loosened a weapon in its holster and nursed the trigger.

Then with a dragging of shoe leather the twelve "good men and true" shambled to a semi-circle before the bench, gazing stolidly and blankly at the rows of battered law-books which served his Honor as a background.

There they stood awkwardly in the gaze of all eyes. Judge Sidering glanced into the beetling countenance of their foreman and inquired in that bored voice which seems a judicial affectation even in questions of life and death, "Gentlemen, have you agreed upon a verdict?"

The foreman nodded. The sheet of paper, which he passed to the Clerk, had been signed by more than one juror with a cross-mark because he could not write.

"We, the jury," read the Clerk in a clear voice,

" find the defendant Luke Thixton guilty as charged in the indictment."

There although he had not yet reached the end he indulged in a dramatic pause, then read on the more important clause in the terms of the Kentucky law which leaves the placing of the penalty in the hands of the jurors —" and fix his punishment at death."

As though relieved from a great pressure young Jeb McNash withdrew his hand from his holster and settled back in his chair with flexed muscles. Judge Sidering's formal question broke on dead quiet, " So say you all, gentlemen? " and twelve shaggy heads nodded wordless affirmation.

Soldiers filed in from the rear. In less than thirty seconds the prisoner had disappeared. Outside the Gatling guns remained in place, and the troops patroled the streets.

For two days the McBriars remained in town, but the troops stayed many days, and in that time Luke had again been taken back to Louisville. Neither of the clans would have been foolhardy enough to have defied the warning scowl of Gatling guns that could rake hills and puncture walls as fast as a man could turn a crank.

Once more Old Milt led back a disgruntled faction with no more spirited a programme than to go home and bide their time again. When they brought Luke back to hang him, they would have one final opportunity.

A seeming of quiet under which hot wrath smoldered settled over hill and cove, but a new note began to run through the cabins of the McBriar dependents. It was a note of waning faith and shaken loyalty for their chief.

From every recent clash of brains and efficiency, the younger man west of the ridge had emerged the victor. Old Milt had been a lion once, but now men said, "It sorter seemed like he'd done lost his gumption." So the lesser McBriars with cooling military ardor began sending their children back to school.

Twice Milt had called his clan out to battle and twice they had responded with no faltering or hesitation. Twice he had ordered them home again with nothing done. When next he called there would be men among them who would not stir from their hearths at his bidding. Meantime their children might as well be learning their rudiments, for in spite of all the quick reversion to type at the call of battle, that spirit which Juanita Holland had planted was growing, and in each interval of peace it became more apparent. Many old and acknowledged ideas were being subtly undermined.

Juanita's spirit began to revive again. Her children were coming back to her and elders came with the children. There were guns again in her rack now, and some of them were guns on which the pale wintry light had glinted that day just before Christmas when the McBriars had made their primitive attack on the bastille.

Old Milt read the signs and felt that his dominion was now a thing upon which decay had set its seal, and under his grave face he was masking a breaking heart. His star was setting, and since he was no longer young and was utterly incapable of bending, he sickened slowly through the wet winter, and men spoke of him as an invalid.

With Milt "ailin'" there was no one to take up the

reins of clan government and those elements that had been held together only by his iron dominance began drifting asunder and weakening.

One mill day when a group of McBriars met with their sacks of grist at a water-mill someone put the question, "Whose a-goin' ter go down thar an' take Luke Thixton away from ther Haveys now thet Old Milt's about petered out?"

There was a long silence and at last a voice drawled, "Hit hain't a-goin' ter be me. What's Luke Thixton ter me anyhow? He didn't nuver lend me no money."

"I reckon thar's a heap o' sense in thet," answered another; "'pears like, when I come ter *ree*collect, mos' of ther fightin' an' fursin' I've done in my time hain't been in my own quarrels nohow." And slowly that spirit spread and gained recruits for peace.

When Anse Havey went over to the school one day about that time Juanita took him again to the rifle-rack, now once more well filled. "Have a look, my Lord Barbarian," she laughed. "Mars is paying me tribute. So ever shall it be with tyranny."

Slowly and one by one Anse Havey took up the pieces and examined them. "It ain't only Mars that's payin' ye tribute," he thought, but he only said: "That's all right. I seem to see more McBriar guns there than Havey guns. It would suit me all right if ye got the last one of 'em."

"Mightn't you as well hang yours there, too?" she challenged. "I'm still willing to give you the honors of war." But he only smiled. "I'll hang mine up last of all, I reckon. Luke Thixton ain't hung yet, and there's other clouds a-brewin' besides that."

"What clouds?" she asked. "Are you still expecting a foreign invasion?"

"There was a bunch of surveyors through here lately," he said slowly. "They just sort of looked round and went away. Some day they'll come back."

"And then?"

Anse Havey shrugged his shoulders. "I may need my gun," he said.

Not until it became certain that he must die did Old Milt send for his son, or even permit him to be told of his illness. But just as the winter's siege was ending Young Milt came home and two days later the mountains heard that the old feudist was dead. When that news reached Luke Thixton in the jail at Louisville he turned his face to the wall of his cell for he knew that his last chance had died with the old McBriar. Now without doubt he must hang.

The father could not force himself as he lay dying in his great four-post bed to make a full confession to his son. Soon he must face a Court where he could no longer dissemble, but he must die without forfeiting Young Milt's respect.

Brother Anse Talbott and Juanita and a doctor who had come from Lexington were witnesses to that leave-taking. They saw the old man beckon feebly to the boy. Young Milt came and sat on the edge of the bed, schooling his features as he awaited the final injunctions which, by his code, would be mandatory for life.

They all waited to hear the old lion break out in a final burst of vindictiveness; to see him lay upon his boy's young shoulders the unfinished ordeals of his hatreds. But it was the eyes of the father, not the

feudist, that gazed up from the pillow. His wasted fingers lay affectionately on his son's knee and his voice was gentle.

"Son," said the old man, "I'd love ter hev ye live at peace ef ye kin. . . . I've done tried ther other way an' hit's kilt me . . . I'd ruther ye'd let my fights be buried along with my body. . . . Anse Havey's goin' ter run things in these mountings. . . . He's a smarter man than me. I couldn't never make no peace with Anse Havey, but the things that's always stood betwixt us lays a long way back. . . . Mebby you an' him mout pull tergether an' end ther feud. . . . I leaves thet with you, but hit took death ter make me see hit. . . ." Here he broke off exhaustedly and for a time seemed fighting for breath. At last he added, "I've knowed all along thet Luke killed Fletch McNash. I thought I'd ought ter tell ye."

A week after the death of the old leader Young Milt rode over to the house of Anse Havey, and there he found Jeb McNash. The two young men looked at each other without expression. Just after the death of the elder McBriar, Jeb would not have willingly renewed their quarrel, and as for Young Milt he no longer felt resentment.

"Anse," said the heir to McBriar leadership, "I rid over here ter offer ye my hand. I've done found out that Luke is es guilty es hell. I didn't believe hit afore. So fur es I'm concerned he kin hang an' I'm goin' ter tell every McBriar man that will hearken ter me ther same thing. So fur as I'm concerned," went on the lad, "I'm against the shootin' of any man from the la'rel."

Just as the earliest flowers began to peep out with shy faces in the woods, and the first softness came to the air, men began rearing a scaffold in the Court-house yard, at Peril.

One day a train brought Luke Thixton back to the hills, but this time only a few soldiers came with him, and they were not needed. Juanita tried to forget the significance of that Friday, but she could not for all the larger boys were absent from school, and all day Thursday the road had been sprinkled with horses and wagons. She knew with a shudder that they were going to town to see the hanging. A gruesome fascination of interest attached to so unheard-of an event as a McBriar clansman dying on a Havey scaffold, with his people standing by idle.

But Luke Thixton, going to his death there among enemies, went without flinching and his snarling lips even twisted a bit derisively when he mounted the scaffold, as they had twisted when he declined Good Anse Talbott's ministrations in the jail.

Now he gazed for the last time about the jumbled levels of the town. Off among the mountains there was just a suggestion of coming green. The sky was full of the amber light that tells of spring. A week later there would be vividly tender little leaves where now there were only buds, but for him of course that would be too late.

Nearer at hand about the square, and further away, even on the roofs of houses, stood and perched and sat his audience. There were women in gay shawls and men on whose faces was only the curiosity of beholding an unusual spectacle. It was different from the type

and temper of the crowd which he would have wished to see there. Now there were no grim faces and glinting rifle barrels, no implacable resolve to save him. Since he must die among enemies he would give them no weakness over which to gloat in memory.

He raised his head and his snarl turned slowly and unpleasantly into a grin of contempt, and his last words were a picturesque curse called down alike on the heads of the foes who put him to death and the false friends who had failed him.

Afterward Young Milt and Bad Anse shook hands, and the younger man said to the older:

"Now that I've proved to ye that I meant what I said, I reckon we can make a peace that'll endure a spell, can't we?" And Anse answered, "Milt, I've been hopin' we could ever since the day we watched for the feller that aimed to burn down the school."

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT spring new buildings went up at the school, and brave rows of flowers appeared in the garden.

At first her college had been a kindergarten in effect, but now as Juanita stood on the porch at recess she wondered if any other school-mistress had ever drawn about her such a strange assortment of pupils. There were little tots in bright calico, glorying in big bows of cotton hair-ribbon — but submitting grudgingly to the combing of the hair they sought to adorn. There were larger boys and girls, too, and even a half-dozen men who were just now pitching horse-shoes and smoking pipes — and they also were learning to read and write.

Off to himself, as morose as though he would brook no kindliness or companionship, was a bony lad of seventeen with a hermit visage, forbidding and sour. He had come to the school almost slinking, from some "spring-branch" back in the hills where his people lived like cattle. He walked with a scowl on his face and a chip on his shoulder and sat apart in the schoolroom, but he studied passionately with a grim tenacity of purpose and his mind drank up what came to it like a sponge.

In the afternoons women rode in on mules and horses or came on foot and Juanita taught them not only let-

ters and figures, but lessons looking to cleaner and more healthful cabins.

May came with smiles and songs in the sky from sunrise to sunset and in the woods, where the moisture rose and tender greens were sending out their hopeful shoots, the wildflowers unfolded themselves. Then Juanita Holland and Anse Havey would go together up to the ridge and watch the great awakening across the brown and gray humps of the hills, and under their feet was a carpet of delicate petals.

Blue clusters of wild flox were everywhere in little patches of cerulean and those demurest of blossoms, the "quaker ladies," lifted timid, dew-drenched faces to the sun.

They would stroll, too, down into the hollows where the earth was damp and the wind-flowers came to snowflake blossoms and the violets were little fallen stars and the wild columbine sprang from the angles of the rocks. The white cups of the May-apple hid there under their umbrella-like leaves. The dogwood soon came to dash the greening woods with white spray and take the place of the pioneer redbud and the frail snow of the wild plum. The leafage was all delicate and young and very bright.

Overhead were tuneful skies and gallantly riding clouds. In the bottom lands the lark sent out his single-noted call and his silvery trill and the black bird and his brilliant cousin, the yellow-winged starling, were flitting everywhere.

Even the ache in Anse Havey's heart, the ache of premonition, gave way to the spirit of spring. These blossoms and sap-fed trees must know that the

future held for them the coming of winter and sleet and snow and death, yet they were joyous now with the fulness and richness of the present. He would make their bright philosophy his own. He was walking these woods with her, and in their silences together she smiled on him, even if she smiled with unawakened eyes.

Was there any woman born here, who could leap as lightly over rocky trails or dip as lithely under hanging ropes of vine or whose voice was more akin to that of the wood thrush, pouring out his soul in happiness and music back there in the timber?

Anse Havey had never had such a companionship and hidden things began to wake in him. He had been, in the stress of life, oak and rock. Now he began to realize the better part, for "in its sunshine he was vine and flower."

So when she stood there, with the spring breeze caressing the curling tendrils at her temples, and blowing her gingham skirt about her slim ankles, and pointed off, smiling, to his house, he dropped his head in mock shame.

"'Only the castle moodily, gloomed by itself apart,'" she quoted in accusation and the man laughed boyishly.

"I reckon ye haven't seen the castle lately," he said. "Ye wouldn't hardly know it. It's gettin' all cleaned up an' made civilized. The eagle's nest is turnin' into a sure-'nough bird-cage."

"Who's changing now?" she bantered. "Am I civilizing you or —" her eyes danced with badinage — "are you preparing to get married?"

His face flushed and then became almost surly.

"Who'd marry me?" he savagely demanded.

"I'm sure I don't know," she teased. "Whom have you asked?"

He bent a little forward, and said slowly:

"Once ye told me I was wastin' my youth. Ye 'lowed I ought to be captain of my soul. If I found a woman that I wanted and she wouldn't have me — what ought I to do about it?"

"There are two courses prescribed in all the correspondence schools, and both are perfectly simple," she announced with mock gravity. "One is to simply take the lady first and ask her afterward. The other is even easier: get another girl."

"Oh!" he said. He was hurt because she had either not seen, or had pretended not to see, his meaning. She had not grasped the presumptuous dream and effrontery of his heart.

His voice for a moment became enigmatical as he said, "Sometimes I think ye've played hell in these mountains."

Usually on their rambles she carried a small book, and now it pleased her to ignore his surly comment and to perch herself on a high and mossy rock and open her little volume. He stood down below with his elbows propped on the top of the bowlder, wearing such a face as Pygmalion may have worn before his marble Galatea turned to rosy flesh and stepped down from her cold pedestal.

"Now listen and I'll tell you what Mr. Browning once had to say on the subject," she ordered and opening the book, she began to read from "The Statue and the Bust."

Slowly, the man, at first impatient of so impersonal a thing as a poet's abstractions, found his interest chained and a fire began to burn in his eyes. Was she reading him that old romance as any woman to any man or as one woman giving a soul-deep hint to one man? As she came to the moral of the story of the Duke who delayed too long in taking what he wished, the man's breath was coming fast and his fingers were clenched.

> "'Be sure that each renewed the vow,
> No to-morrow's sun should arise and set
> And leave them then as it left them now.'"

She let the book drop for a moment and her eyes strayed. The man felt his body stiffen, and after a while she took up the little volume and began to read, once more he fancied with a little sigh.

> "'But the next day passed and the next day yet,
> With still fresh cause to wait one day more
> Ere each leaped over the parapet.'"

He was sure this time that from her half-parted lips a sigh had broken, and that there was personal wistfulness in the little line between her brows. He bent closer and prompted in a voice which he knew came hoarsely, "Go on."

> "'So. While these wait the trump of doom
> How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
> Nights and days in the narrow room.
>
> "'I hear you reproach, "But delay was best
> Since, their end was a crime." "Oh, a crime will do
> As well," I reply, "to serve for a test.
>
> As a golden virtue through and through . . .
> And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost,
> Is the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin. . . .'"'

She shook her head as one who would shake off a thought which carries a deep hurt, and then, looking up at Anse Havey, she gave a little start and forced a smile.

Suddenly it had come to the man that perhaps after all he, too, had repeated the Duke's mistake. He, too, had one youth which was passing and could not be renewed. He could not even set up a statue in the square in memory of its love. Slowly the veins of his temples swelled into cords. His eyes caressed and devoured the face of the girl perched there above him on the rock. One of her hands rested on the moss and toward it his own hand crept. Then it was that she looked at him with a start and smiled. The man's hand came back and in his chest rose a groan which did not reach his lips. Though she had been reading *at* him she had not been reading *to* him. She had been thinking all the while of another — of Roger Malcolm, he supposed — and when she had looked up and realized after her revery that he was there, it had been almost as if he had come suddenly and had surprised her. From such thoughts as those he was an exile.

"So you see," she said blithely enough, "Mr. Browning seems to favor the first course recommended by the correspondence schools, rather than the second."

"The case ain't just the same sort, I reckon," he said with an effort. "The lady loved him, too, ye see . . . and besides he was a king . . . or pretty nigh a king."

"Every man can be a king if he will," she declared and the furrow came back. "I knew a man once who was like the Duke. He waited."

Anse Havey gripped his teeth together.

"I'm obleeged to ye for the advice," he said. "Will ye lend me that book? I reckon I'll read that thing over again sometime."

That spring silent forces were at work in the hills; as silent and less beneficent than the stirring sap and the brewing of showers.

Three men in the mountains were now fully convinced that what the world needs the world will have, and they were trying to find a solution to the question which might make their own people sharers in the gain, instead of victims. These three were Anse and Milt and Jeb, and their first step was the effort to hold land-owners in check, and make them slow to sell and guarded in their bargaining.

Jim Fletcher, a mountain man who had for years drifted between Tribulation and Winchester, trading in cattle and timber, made a journey through the hills that spring, and was everywhere received as "home-folks." For him there were no bars of distrust and he was able for that reason to buy land right and left. Though he had paid for it at a price above the average it was a price far below the value of the coal and timber it contained — and Jim had picked his land.

Anse Havey and his associates knew that Jim Fletcher had been subsidized; that the money he spent so lavishly was not his own money; and that he came as a stalking horse, but they did not know that he had been to Louisville and had conferred there with Mr. Trevor. Neither did they know at once that he had visited the cabins of every malcontent among both the former factions and that he was a mischief-maker

adroitly laying here in the hills the foundation for a new feud.

Jim had a bland tongue and a persuasive manner and he talked to the mountain men in their own speech, but he was none the less the advance agent of the new enemy from down below: the personal fulfilment of Juanita's prophecy to Roger Malcolm.

At the school things were going on actively and hopefully, with now and then a marring note of discouragement.

One Friday afternoon the sullen boy came in. His face was flushed and his appearance hinted of drinking. He said no word, made no apology, but with his manner of defiance for any question, went to the rack and took out his rifle and his revolver.

The next day was Saturday and that afternoon Bad Anse Havey was walking with Juanita.

The girl had anxiously told him about the coming of the sullen boy to withdraw his rifle from her shrine. "What does it mean, Anse?" she demanded. He had laughed.

"I reckon," he retorted, "it means that ye can't change nature in a day nor grow a poplar tree in a flower pot."

Then while they still talked there was a yell from the road and a clatter of hooves. They looked out to see one of those old mountain demonstrations that used to punctuate Saturday afternoons.

A party of drunken horsemen were galloping with their bridle reins in their teeth and firing off rifles and pistols in the air with both hands. They were "ridin' about, huntin' trouble." They were attacking no one,

unless some one should venture to smile or frown at them. They were showing themselves free-born citizens and a law to themselves and they were all full of whiskey and quarrel.

They passed the school and their shots and shouts went around the turn of the road. At their head rode the sullen boy who studied with passionate ardor and zest.

Juanita sighed, but Bad Anse only smiled.

"Let 'em be," he said philosophically. "They'll sober up after while. Just be right glad at the progress ye've made —"

"Anse," she suddenly exclaimed, "you must counsel your people not to take their guns away."

"Me!" he exclaimed. "Ain't ye pushing our contract right far? When did I ever stand for clippin' an eagle's claws?"

And yet the feud-leader did cause a word to go from cabin to cabin, to the effect that the public bearing of arms was now unnecessary, and showed a lack of confidence in Young Milt McBriar, who was no longer an enemy, but a friend.

"Take your rifles and hang 'em up at the school, boys," he suggested to a group one day on the roadside. "As long as they're there they'll be out of mischief."

After he had spoken and ridden on several heads shook dubiously.

"Looks like Anse is changin' right smart," said one. "It beats me how some fellers let a woman lead 'em 'round."

"Et a woman's leadin' him round," retorted a more

loyal defender, " no one else don't. I reckon hit hain't hardly becomin' fer none of ye folks ter criticise Anse Havey. As fer me I hangs my old rifle-gun up on the peg this same day, an' ef anybody's got any remarks ter make about hit, I'm ready ter listen."

In a few days the boy came back. He never alluded to his outbreak or breathed a word of apology, but he put the gun back in its place and once more attacked his books.

Sometimes a lad or older man, going out, would pause irresolute at the rack and eye his weapon covetously, but in the end he hearkened to counsel and left it there.

" What are you doing, Bruce? " inquired Juanita one day as she found a tow-headed lad of twenty standing before her shrine with a look of longing in his face.

" I was jest feelin' kinder lonesome withouten my rifle-gun," was the reply. " Hit used ter be my dad's an' hit's done some good work in hits day."

Juanita nodded and it was her smile rather than her words which proved disarming.

" Yes, I know," she sympathized, " but those days are over. These are days of peace."

The girl did not realize how much she was leaning on the strength of Anse Havey, how she depended on him for counsel and encouragement, which he gave not in behalf of the school, but because he was the schoolteacher's slave. She saw the little hospital rise on the hill and thought of what it would do, and she believed that Anse Havey must be, in his heart, converted, even though his mountain obstinacy withheld the admission.

Then while the roads and hillsides were joyous with spring came a squad of lads bearing transit and chain,

who begun running a tentative line through the land that Jim Fletcher had bought. Anse Havey watched them grimly with arms folded, but said no word until they came to the boundary of his own place. There he met them at the border. "Boys," he said, "ye mustn't cross that fence. This is my land an' I forbids ye."

Their foreman argued.

"We only want to take the measurements necessary to complete our line, Mr. Havey, we won't work any injury."

Anse shook his head.

"Come in, boys, an' eat with me an' make yourselves at home," he told them, "but leave your tools outside."

Men from the brick house patroled the fence line with rifles and the young men were forced to turn back.

But later they drew near the house of old Bob McGreeger, and he, stealing down to a place in the thicket of rhododendron, saw them perilously near the trickling stream which even then bore on its surface little kernels of yellow corn. Deeply and violently Old Bob swore as he drank, from his little blue keg, and when next day he saw them again he asked counsel of no man. He went down and crept close through the laurel, and as his old rifle spoke a school-boy from the Bluegrass fell dead in the creek bed.

CHAPTER XXXII

AFTER that death, the first murder of an innocent outsider the war which Anse Havey had so long foreseen broke furiously and brought the orders of upland and lowland to the grip of bitter animosity.

Old McGreeger's victim had been young Roy Calvin, the son of Judge Calvin of Lexington and the name of Calvin in central Kentucky was one associated with the State's best traditions.

It had run, in a strong bright thread through the pattern of Kentucky's achievements and when news of the wanton assassination came home, the State awoke to a shock of horror. The infamy of the hills was screamed in echo to the mourning and the name of Bad Anse Havey was once more printed in large type.

Editorial and news column alluded to him as the patron saint of the lawless order, which made such outrages possible. Though Anse held his peace, Juanita saw lines of stoical sternness settling around the corners of his lips, and knew that he was silently burning with the injustice of reports which he pretended not to hear.

The men whose capital sought to wrest profit from the hills and whose employé had been slain, were quick to utilize this hue and cry of calumny.

They hurled themselves into their fight, for gaining possession of coveted land, and were not particular as to methods.

Jim Fletcher came and went constantly between the lowlands and highlands. He was all things to all men and in the hills he cursed the lowlander, but in the lowlands cursed the hills. Milt and Jeb and Anse rode constantly from cabin to cabin in their efforts to circumvent the adroit schemes of the mountain Judas who had sold his soul to the foreign syndicate.

Fletcher sought a foot-hold for capital to pierce fields acquired at the price of undeveloped land and then to take the profit of development. Anse sought to hold title until the sales could be on a fairer basis and so the issue was made up.

Capitalists like Malcolm who sat in directors' rooms launching a legitimate enterprise had no actual knowledge of the instrumentalities being employed on the real battle-field. Lawyers tried condemnation suits with indifferent success and then reached out their hands for a new weapon.

Back in the old days when Kentucky was not a State, but a County, land-patents had been granted by Virginia to men who had never claimed their property. For two hundred years other men who settled as pioneers had held undisturbed possession: they and their children's children. Now into the Courts piled multitudinous suits of eviction in the names of plaintiffs whose eyes had never seen the broken skyline of the Cumberlands. The purpose was deceit since it sought to drag through long and costly litigation pauper land-holders and to impose upon their poverty

such a galling burden as should drive them to ultimate terms of surrender.

Men and women who owned, or thought they owned, a log shack and a tilting cornfield found themselves facing a new and bewildering crisis. Their untaught minds brooded and they talked violently of holding by title of rifle what their fathers had wrested from Nature; what they had tended with sweat and endless toil.

But Anse Havey and Milt McBriar knew that the day was at hand when the rifle would no longer serve. They employed lawyers fitted to meet those other lawyers and give them battle in the Courts and these lawyers were paid by Anse Havey and Milt McBriar.

The two stood stanchly together as a buffer between their almost helpless people and the encroaching tentacles of the new octopus, while Juanita, looking on at the forming of the battle-lines, was torn with anxiety.

Once she said, "Anse, Roger Malcolm speaks of coming here."

"Ye'd better warn him not to come," said Anse grimly. Then he added: "Oh, he wouldn't have no call to fear nothin' from me. There's a reason why I ain't licensed to harm him. But there's a spirit in the hills I won't answer for. If he comes he mightn't get back."

He paused, then added: "But maybe ye wants to see him?"

She shook her head, a little mournfully, but with decision.

"No," she said slowly. "Once I wished for him all the time — but that's over now."

In one way, of course, that statement meant noth-

ing. It did not narrow by an inch the breadth of the chasm between them — a chasm of caste and kind. Yet so hungrily does a heart which loves grasp after straws of encouragement that Anse Havey carried home a lighter heart and hopes wildly clamoring for recognition.

In Bad Anse Havey the combination of interests recognized its really formidable foe. In the mountain phrase he must be "man-powered outen ther way." And there were still men in the hills, who if other means failed would sell the service of their "rifle-guns" for money. With such as these, it became the care of certain supernumeraries to establish an understanding. In the last election a thing had happened which had not for many years before happened in Kentucky; a change of parties had swept from power in Frankfort the administration which owed loyalty to Havey influences.

It was only at Juanita's school that any seeming of tranquillity remained. There while the elements were battling all about, the pupils were learning and the sick were being tended.

The girl did not know that Anse Havey carried in his pocket through these troubled times a small copy of Browning, and that often he read again, or repeated to himself:

> "The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost;
> Is — the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin —"

or that in his head and heart was going on a debate more vital even than squatters' rights versus Virginia patents.

A new law had recently been written into the criminal jurisprudence of the State, providing that a change of venue might be granted in cases of felony on the motion of the Commonwealth as well as that of the defense. It was a good law, making it possible to take a criminal out of a district where the hands of justice were bound by local prejudice or local fear. Now the learned counsel for the syndicate bethought themselves of its possibilities and smiled.

Bad Anse Havey was indicted as an accessory to the murder of young Calvin and he would be tried not in Peril, but in the Bluegrass. The prosecution would be able to show that he had warned the surveyors off his own place and had picketed his fence line with rifle-men. They would be able to show that he was the forefront of the fight against innovation and that lesser mountain men followed his counsel and regarded his word as law. But more than that the Jurors who passed on his question of life and death would be drawn from a community which knew him only by his newspaper-made reputation.

So it was not long before Anse Havey lay in a cell in the Winchester jail. He had been denied bond, and fronted a dreary prospect as he quoted to himself:

> "The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost;
> Is — the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin —"

. . . . . .

Deep in the heart of the Bluegrass Kentuckian lies implanted a spirit of justice and fair play, but his nature is passionate. He flashes up hotly to battle and sometimes sees through eyes blind with prejudice.

When the trial of Anse Havey began there was one spirit in the land. Here was an exponent of the unjustifiable system of murder from ambush. In the cemetery at Lexington where sleep the founders of the Western empire, lay a boy whose life had just begun in all the blossom and sunshine of promise — and who had done no wrong.

Over that same city of the dead, dominating it from a tall shaft, rose Joel Hart's great figure of Henry Clay.

It stood as the Great Commoner had often stood in life, with one hand outstretched in earnest plea and head raised in devoted eloquence, protesting against the shedding of fraternal blood. It was the high privilege of the men drawn from that jury panel to make of the accused such an example as should awe his fellow murderers.

The special term of the Court had brought to Winchester a throng of farmer folk and on-lookers. Their horses stood hitched at the racks about the square when the Sheriff led Anse Havey from the jail to the old building where he was to face his accusers and the Judges, who sat on the bench and in the jury-box.

White ribbons of smooth turnpike rattled in the summer drowsiness to the hooves of trotting horses as the friends of the murdered boy trooped in from mansions and cottages set in woodlands where the bluegrass waved knee-deep. They came to see justice meted out to this arch-fiend of the wild mountains. Negroes nudged each other and pointed to him with loud guffaws of derision as he walked, passive of mien and erect of shoulder, from his cell to the columned front of the

Clark County Court-house. It was not his world, but the richer, prouder world of his enemies.

Back in the tiers of benches was no hodden gray mass of men in butternut and women in calico, but farmers whose acres were rich and young men in clean linen and girls in gayly flapping, flower-trimmed hats and shimmery summer gowns.

He had once before walked among such people as a law-maker in the State Capital. Now they sought to send him back to Frankfort as a convict — unless they could do better and hang him. He took his seat with his counsel at his elbow and listened to the preliminary formalities of impaneling a Jury. His face told nothing, but as man after man was excused because he had formed an opinion, he read little that was hopeful in the outlook. One old farmer rose belligerently when his name was reached and glared vengefully at the prisoner.

"Have you any bias or prejudice which would prevent you from giving this defendant a fair and impartial trial under the law and the evidence?" came the monotonous question, and almost before it had ended the venire-man blazed back, "I've got a prejudice against any man that assassinates his neighbor."

He had voiced the sentiment of his County. He was a little more outspoken than his fellows, but that was the sole difference. Anse Havey's face remained mask-like and no expression of anxiety showed in his eyes. He was very tired and sat through the taking of evidence and through the vitriolic denunciation of the Commonwealth's statement with none of the desperado's bravado and none of the coward's fear.

He calmly heard perjured witnesses from his own country testify that he had approached them, offering bribes for the killing of young Calvin which they had righteously refused. He knew that these men had been bought by Jim Fletcher and that they swore away his life for the hire of syndicate money, but he only waited patiently for the defense to open. He saw the scowl on the faces in the jury-box deepen into conviction as witness after witness took the stand against him, and he saw the faces of on-lookers mirror that scowl. He felt rather than saw the wilting confidence of his own counsel and when, at the Court recesses he was led back to his jail lodgings like a bear on an organ grinder's chain, negroes and children followed him in little, excited crowds.

Then the prosecution rested and as a few of its perjuries were punctured, the faces in the box lightened their scowl a little — but very little. The tide had set against him, and he knew it. Unless one of those strangely psychological things should occur which sweep Juries suddenly from their moorings of fixed opinion, he must be the sacrifice to Bluegrass wrath, and on the list of witnesses under the hand of his attorney there were only a few names left — pitifully few.

Then Anse Havey saw his chief counsel set his jaw as he had a trick of setting it when he faced a forlorn hope, and throw the list of names aside as something worthless. As the lawyer spoke Anse Havey's face for the first time lost its immobility and showed amazement. He bent forward, wondering if his ears had not

tricked him. His attorneys had not consulted him as to this step.

"Mr. Sheriff," commanded the lawyer for the defense, "call Miss Juanita Holland to the stand."

CHAPTER XXXIII

IF in the mountains there was one person of whom the Bluegrass knew with favor, it was Juanita Holland. She had worked quietly and without any blare of trumpets. Her efforts had never been advertised, but the thing she was trying to do was too unusual a thing to have escaped public notice and public laudation. That she was spending her life and her own large fortune, in a manner of self-sacrifice and hardship, was a thing of which the State had been duly apprised.

She at least would stand acquitted of feudal passion. She stood as a lone fighter for the spirit of all that was best and most unselfish in Kentucky ideals and the ideals of civilization.

If she chose to come now as a character witness for Anse Havey, she should have respectful hearing. The prisoner bent forward and fixed eyes, blazing with excitement, on the door of the witness-room. He saw it open and saw her pause there, rather pale and perplexed, then she came steadily to the witness stand and asked: "Do I sit here?"

The man had known her always in the calico and gingham of the mountains. This seemed a different woman, as she took her seat and raised her hand to be sworn. She was infinitely more beautiful, he thought, in the habiliments of her own world. She seemed a

queen who had waived her regal prerogatives and come into this mean court-room in his behalf. His heart leaped into tumult. He would not have asked her to come; would not have permitted her to submit to the heckling of the prosecutor whose face was already drawing into a vindictive frown, had he known. She had come anyway — perhaps after all she cared! If so it was a revelation worth hanging for.

Then he heard her voice, low and quietly pitched, in answer to questions.

"I have known Mr. Havey," she said evenly, "ever since I went to the mountains. He has helped me in my work and has been an advocate of peace, wherever peace could be had with honor."

At the end of each answer the Commonwealth's attorney was on his feet with quickly snapped objections. Anse Havey's heart sank. He knew this man's brutal capacity for bullying witnesses and he had never seen a woman who had come through the ordeal unshaken. Yet slowly the anxiety on his face gave way to a smile of infinite admiration. Juanita Holland's quiet dignity made the testy wrath of the State's lawyer seem futile and peevish.

The defendant saw a subtle change of expression dawning on the faces of the Jury. He saw them shifting their sympathy from the lawyer to the woman and the lawyer saw it, too. They kept her there, grilling her by all the tactics known to artful lawyers for an unconscionable length of time, but to each brow-beating question she returned a calm and unshaken response.

"By God!" exclaimed Anse Havey to himself as

he leaned forward, "she's makin' fools of 'em all — an' she's doin' it for me!"

Even the Judge whose face had been sternly set against the defense shifted in his chair and his expression softened. The Commonwealth's attorney rose and walked forward, and Anse Havey clenched his hands under the table while his fingers itched to seize the tormentor's throat.

"You don't know that Anse Havey didn't incite this murder. You only choose to think so. Isn't that a fact?" stormed the prosecutor.

"I know that Anse Havey is incapable of it," was the tranquil retort.

"How do you know that?"

"I know *him*."

"Who procured your presence in this court-room as a witness for the defense?" Each interrogation came with rising spleen and slurring accusation of tone.

"I asked to be allowed to come."

"Why?"

"Because I know that back of this prosecution lies the trickery which seeks to dispose of Anse Havey so that it may plunder his people."

The lawyer wheeled on the Judge.

"I must insist that your Honor admonish this witness against such false and improper charges or punish her for contempt," he blazed furiously.

But the Judge spoke without great severity as he cautioned, "Yes — the witness must not seek to attribute motives to the Commonwealth."

If Juanita, however, was sustaining with no outward show of discomfort the savage onslaughts of a man

trained in the art of confounding those who sat in the pillory of the witness-chair, she was inwardly feeling need of holding her emotions masked and in check. As the questions became more and more personal, and she recognized in their trend the purpose of making her appear biased, she first flushed a little, then paled a little, but her voice betrayed no hint of annoyance.

The attorney took another step forward with a malicious smile. He paused that the next question and its answer might fall on the emphasis of a momentary silence. He pointed a finger toward the girl and demanded.

"Is there any sentimental attachment between you and this defendant, Anse Havey?"

There was a moment's dead silence in the court-room, and Anse saw Juanita's face go white. Then he saw her finger nails whiten as they lay in her lap and a sudden flush spread to her face.

She looked toward the Judge, and at once the lawyer for the defense was on his feet with the old objection: "The question is irrelevant."

Then, while counsel tilted with each other, the girl drew a long breath, and the man whose life was in the balance turned pale, too, not because of this, but because the woman he loved had been asked the question which was more to him than life and death — a question he had never dared to ask himself.

"I think," ruled the Court, "the question is relevant as tending to affect the credibility of the witness."

So she must answer.

The prisoner's finger nails bit into his palms and he smothered a low oath between his clenched teeth, but

Juanita Holland only looked at the cross-examiner with a clear-eyed and serene glance of scorn under which he seemed to shrivel. She replied with the dignity of a young queen who can afford to ignore insults from the gutter.

"None whatever."

The defendant sat back in his chair and the smile left his lips like writing effaced from a slate with a wet sponge. He knew that his case was won, and yet as he saw her leave the witness-stand and the court-room, he felt sicker at heart than he had felt since he could remember. He would have preferred condemnation with the hope against hope left somewhere deep in his heart, that there slept in hers an echo to his unuttered love.

The question he had never dared to ask, she had answered; answered under oath and liberty seemed now a very barren gift.

When he had been acquitted and was going out he saw a figure in consultation with the prosecutor; a figure which had not been inside the doors during the trial. It was Mr. Trevor, of Louisville, and he was testily saying, "Oh, well, there are more ways of killing a cat than by choking it with butter."

Anse Havey did not require the interpretation of an oracle for that cryptic comment. He knew that the effort to dispose of him would not end with his acquittal.

Juanita was going away to enlist her staff of teachers and arrange for the equipment of the little hospital and the man did not tell her of his insecurity.

"You'll promise to be very careful while I'm away,

won't you?" she demanded as they sat together the night before she left.

"I'll try to last till you get back," he smiled. He was sitting with a pipe in his hand which had gone out and been forgotten.

In the darkness of the porch everything was vague, but herself. She seemed to him to be luminous by some light of her own. She was a very wonderful and desirable star, shining far out of reach of his world.

Suddenly she laughed, and he asked:

"What is it?"

"I was just thinking what a fool I was when I came here," she answered. "Did you know that I brought a piano with me as far as Peril? It's been there over a year."

"A piano!" he echoed, then they both laughed.

"I might as well have tried to bring along the Philadelphia City Hall," she admitted. "Just the same there have been times when it would have meant a lot to me, an awful lot, if I could have had that piano. I don't know whether music means so much to you, but to me —"

"I know," he broke in. "I sometimes 'low that life ain't much else except the summin' up of the things a feller dreams. Music is like dreams — it makes dreams. Yes, I know somethin' about that."

She went away and though she was not long gone, her absence seemed interminable to Anse Havey. On her return, he met her at the train, with a starved idolatry in his eyes and together they rode back across the ridge.

But when she entered the building, which had been

the first school-house, the man drew back a step or two to the rear and watched as surreptitiously as a boy who has in due secrecy planned a surprise.

She went in and then suddenly halted and stood near the threshold in amazement. Her eyes began to dance and she gave a little gasp of delight. There against one wall stood her piano.

She turned to find Anse Havey waiting in the door as awkwardly as a green boy. Just how difficult a task it had been to bring that great weight across those roads unharmed, she could only guess. He must in effect have built the roads before him as Napoleon built them for his armies.

She turned to him, deeply moved, and after the first flush of delight, her eyes were misty.

"I wonder how I am ever going to thank you,— for everything," she said softly.

But Bad Anse Havey only answered in an embarrassed voice, "I reckoned it might be a little jingly, so I had a feller come up from Lexington, and tune it up."

She went over and struck a chord, then she came back and laid a hand on his coat-sleeve.

"I'm not going to try to thank you at all — now," she said. "But you go home and come back this evening, and we'll have a little party, just you and I . . . with music."

"Good-by," he said. "I reckon ye haven't noticed it — but my rifle's standin' there in your rack."

It was a night of starlight with just a sickle moon overhead, and the music of the whippoorwills in the air when Anse presented himself again at the school. He

knew that he must break off these visits because while she had been away he had taken due accounting of himself and recognized that the poignant pain of locked lips would drive him beyond control. He could no longer endure "the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin." Now the sight of her set him into a palpitating fever and a burning madness. He would invent some excuse to-night and go away.

Then he came to the open door and stood on the threshold, transfixed by the sight which greeted his eyes. His hat dropped to the floor and lay there.

He thought he knew Juanita. Now he suddenly realized that the real Juanita he had never seen before, and as he looked at her he felt infinitely far away from her. He was a very dim, faint star in apogee.

She sat with her back turned and her fingers straying over the keys of the piano — and she was in evening dress! The shaded lamp shone softly on ivory shoulders and a string of pearls glistened at her throat. Around her slim figure, the soft folds of her gown fell like gossamer draperies and she was flawlessly beautiful.

She had followed a whim that night and "dressed up" to surprise him. She had promised him a party and meant to receive him with as much preparation as she would have made for royalty. But to him it was only a declaration of the difference between them, emphasizing how unattainable she was; how unthinkably remote from his own rough world.

Then as she heard his steps and rose, she was disappointed because in his face instead of pleasure she read only a tumult whose dominant note was distress.

"Don't you like me?" she asked as she gave him her hand and smiled up at him.

"Like you!" he burst out, then he caught himself with something like a gasp. "Yes," he said dully, "I like you."

For a while she played and sang and then they went out to the porch where she sank down in the barrel-stave hammock which hung there and he sat in a split-bottomed chair by her side.

He sat very moody and silent with his hands resting on his knees, trying to repress what he could not long hope to repress.

She seemed oblivious to his deep abstraction for she was humming some air — low, almost under her breath.

But at last she sat up and laughed a silvery and subdued, yet a happy little laugh. She stretched her arms up above her head. "It's good to be back, Anse," she said softly. "I've missed you — lots."

He dared not tell her how he had missed her and he did not recognize the new note in her voice — the heart note. There was a strange silence between them and as they sat, so close that each could almost feel the other's breath, their eyes met and held in a locked gaze.

Slowly as though drawn by some occult power over which he held no control the man bent a little nearer, a little nearer. Slowly the girl's eyes dilated, and then with no word she suddenly gave a low exclamation, half gasp, half appeal, all inarticulate, and both hands went groping out toward him.

With something almost like a cry, Anse Havey was on his knees by the hammock, and both his arms were around her and her head was on his shoulder. Then

he was kissing her cheeks and lips, and into his soul was coming a sudden discovery with the softness and coolness of the flesh his lips touched.

It lasted only a moment, then she pushed him back gently and rose while one bare arm went gropingly across her face, and the other hand went out to the porch post for support.

In a voice low and broken she said, "You must go."

"No," he exclaimed, and took a step toward her. But she retreated a little and shook her head.

"Yes, dear — please," she almost whispered, and the man bowed in acquiescence.

"Good-night," he said gravely, and, picking up his hat, he started across the ridge. But now there were no ghosts in his life for all the way over that rough trail he was looking up at the stars and incredulously telling them over and over again, "She loves me!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN a small room over the post-office in Peril an attorney, whose professional success had always been precarious, received those few clients who came to him for consultation. The lawyer's name was Walter Hackley, but he was better known as Clay-heel Hackley because he never wore socks and his bare ankles were tanned to the hue of river-bank mud. His features were wizened and his eyes shifty. He was a coward, an intriguer by nature and inclination. It was logical enough that when the verdict of the directors' table that Bad Anse Havey was a nuisance filtered down the line, the persons seeking native methods for abating the nuisance should come to Clay-heel Hackley.

One day in August this attorney-at-law, Jim Fletcher and a tricky youth, who enjoyed the distinction of holding office as telegraph operator at the Peril Station, caucused together in Hackley's dingy room.

In the death of Bad Anse Havey this trio saw a joint advantage since the abating of such a nuisance would not go unrewarded.

"Gentlemen," said the attorney, his wizened face working nervously, "this business has need to be expeditious. Gentlemen, it requires, in its nature, to be expeditious. A few more failures and we are done for."

"Well, tell us how ye aims ter do hit," growled the telegraph operator.

"Jim Fletcher has the idea," replied the lawyer impressively. "Quite the right idea. How many men can you trust on a job, like this, Jim?"

"As many as ye needs," was the confident response. "A dozen or a score if they're wanted."

"Enough to make it sure, but not too many," urged Hackley. "We should set a day, precisely as the Court would set a day for — er — an execution. The force you send out should simply stay on the job until it's done. If Anse Havey can be gotten alone, so much the better. But above all —" the lawyer paused and spoke with his most forceful emphasis —"don't just wound this man. See that the thing is finally and definitely settled."

"I'll be there myself," Jim Fletcher assured him. "Now, when is this day goin' ter be?"

"This is Monday," reflected the attorney. "There's no advantage in delay. It will take a day or two to get ready. Let the case be docketed, as I might say — for Thursday."

. . . . . .

After the evening when Anse Havey had taken Juanita in his arms he had not come again to the school.

Juanita had not understood this strange absence at such a time, but in a fashion she welcomed it. The occurrences of that night were still unaccountable to her, and she wanted time to think the thing all out and to take an inventory of her life. When she had sworn that there was no sentiment between Anse and herself, she had believed it. While she had been away in the

East she had found herself looking about always for a face that she missed, the face of Bad Anse Havey. But she had not yet diagnosed that as love. That night had been one of unaccountable hypnotism and moon-madness. Of that she felt sure and she would tell him that it must all be forgotten.

If it were a real awakening to love it was still too sudden to be trusted and must be tested by time. Yet even now at the thought of his compelling eyes something new and powerful stirred her.

Anse Havey had gone to Lexington. Never again did he mean to hold against himself the accusation of "the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin." He knew that she loved him. He knew that there was something out of which resistance would come, because in her voice after that moment in his arms, there had been a pain and a wistfulness. She had asked him to go and he had gone, feeling that it would have been unkind to question her. But in his mind had been only one question and now that was answered. She loved him.

Any other difficulty that the world held he would sweep aside. When next he went back he would not ask her to marry him, he would announce to her that she was going to marry him.

In Lexington he had bought a ring and at Peril he had gotten a marriage-license. His camp-following days were over. He had one youth and he knew that if his enemies succeeded in their designs, this might at any day be snapped short with sudden death. It did not seem to him that one of its golden hours should be wasted.

As he came out of the Court-house with the invaluable

piece of paper in his pocket, two men, seemingly unarmed, rose from the doorway of the store across the street and drifted toward their hitched horses.

Young Milt McBriar had ridden over to Peril that day, with several companions, and Anse Havey went back with them. So it happened that quite accidentally he made that journey under escort. The men who rode a little way in his rear cursed their luck — and waited. And though they lurked in hiding all that afternoon near Anse Havey's house they saw nothing more of their intended victim.

Anse was keenly alive to each day's impending threat and when he had recognized the face of Jim Fletcher, in Peril, as he came through the town he had read mischief in the eyes, and recognized that the menace had drawn closer.

So when he was ready to cross the ridge to the school he obeyed an old sense of caution and left his horse saddled at the front fence that it might seem as if he were going out — but had not yet gone.

He had sent by messenger a summons for Good Anse Talbott and the preacher arrived while he was at his supper table.

"Brother Anse," he announced, "I'm goin' to need ye some time betwixt now and midnight. I want ye to tarry here till I come back."

"What's the nature of business ye needs me fer, Anse?" demanded the missionary. "I hadn't hardly ought ter tarry. Thar's a child ailin' up the top fork of little branch of Turkey-Foot Creek."

But Bad Anse only shook his head. "It's the best business ye ever did," he confidently assured the

preacher, "but I can't tell ye yet. Is the child in any danger?"

"I reckon not, hit's jest ailin', but—"

The brown-faced man sat dubiously shaking his head, and Anse's features suddenly set and hardened.

"I needs ye," he said. "Ain't that enough? I'm goin' to need ye bad."

"That's a right-strong reason, Anse, but—"

For an instant the old dominating will which had not yet learned to brook mutiny, leaped into Anse Havey's eyes. His words came in a harsher voice.

"Will you stay of your own free will because I'm goin' to need ye, Brother Anse?" he demanded. "Because, by God, ye're goin' to stay — one way or another."

"Does ye mean ye aims ter hold me hyar by force?"

"Not unless ye make me. I wouldn't hardly like to do that."

For a moment the missionary debated. He did not resent the threat of coercion. He believed in Anse Havey and the form of request convinced him of its urgency.

So he nodded his head. "I'll be hyar when ye comes," he said.

Anse left his house that night neither by front nor back, but in the dark shadows at one side, and his talisman of luck led his noiseless feet safely between the scattered sentinels who were watching his dwelling to kill him.

It was a brilliant night and the hollows were full of moon mist, but where the shadows fell they fell blackly.

The chorus of whippoorwills and night music sang

to him, because his heart was very full of joy. The air breathed soft passion and the breeze whispered of love as it harped drowsily in the jet plumes of the tree tops.

A spirit of languorous, yet powerful appeal rode with the mother-of-pearl shimmer of the clouds. The silvery luminance of the moonlight seemed as miraculous as the essence of dreams, but the iron-gray ridges, paling in the distance to misty platinum, were immemorial pledges of permanence.

Juanita Holland was there and he was going to her and after to-night she should be Juanita Havey!

> "No to-morrow's sun should arise and set
> And leave them then as it left them now."

He noticed as he passed the Widow Everson's cabin, that it was dark and closed, and he remembered that she and her family had gone away to visit friends in town. The McNash children, even, were down at Jeb's cabin, so Juanita was quite alone.

The school-buildings slept in silent shadows, except that from the open door of the room where her piano stood, there came a soft flooding of lamplight; a single dash of orange in the nocturne of silver and gray. He went up very quietly, pausing to drink deep of the fragrance of the honeysuckle, and there drifted out to him the music of the piano and the better music of her voice.

She was singing a love-song.

Though he had sent no word of his coming, she was once more in evening dress; all black, save for a crimson flower at her breast and a crimson flower in her

hair. But this time the sight of her in the costume so foreign to the hills did not distress him; it was a night that called for wonders.

She rose as the man's footstep sounded on the floor and then, at memory of their last meeting, the color mounted richly to her cheeks and he took her again in his arms.

She raised her hands to his shoulders and tried to push him back, but he held her firmly and while she sought to tell him that they must find their way back to the colorless level of friendship, he could feel the wild flutter of her heart.

"Listen," she protested. "You must listen." But Bad Anse Havey laughed.

"Ever since the first time I saw ye," he declared, "I've been listenin'. It's been a duel always between you and me. But the duel's over now an' this time I win."

She looked up and her pupils began to widen with that intense expression which is the drawing aside of the curtains from a woman's soul, and as though she realized that she could not trust herself to his eyes she turned her face away. Only in its profile could he read the struggle between mind and heart and what he read filled him with elation.

"Anse," she said in a very low voice, "give me a truce. For one hour let me think; it involves both our lives for always; let me at least have the chance to be sane. Give me an hour."

The man stepped back and released her, and she turned and led the way out to the porch where she sank down in the hammock with her face buried in both

hands. When she looked up she was smiling rather wanly.

"It can't be, dear," she said. But while she argued with words and ostensible reasons the night was arguing, too, arguing for him with all its sense-steeping fragrances and cadences and appeals that stirred sleeping fires in their hearts!

And while she talked he made no response, but sat there silently attentive. At last he looked at his watch and put it back in his pocket. He rose and said quietly, but with a tone of perfect finality:

"Your truce is over."

"But don't you see? You haven't answered one of my arguments."

Anse Havey laughed once more. "I didn't come to argue," he said, "I came to act." He drew from his pocket the license and ring. "Brother Anse Talbott is waitin' over at my house," he said. "Will you go over there or shall I go back an' fotch him here?"

CHAPTER XXXV

JUANITA rose from the hammock, and stood unsteadily in the blue moonlight; an image of ivory and ebony. The man clamped both hands behind his back and gripped them there — waiting. But despite his seeming of confidence and calm his brain reeled gloriously with an intoxication of the soul. He saw her standing there, straight and lithe and slender, with the moon-washed sky at her back and the inky shadows of the porch throwing the picture into a vivid relief.

He saw the flower on her breast rise and fall under the quick tumult of her emotion. He saw the lips he had loved so long half parted, and he knew that she must yield to her heart's ultimatum. He saw everything with the steady eagle eyes that held and fascinated her, and that kindled, as she gazed into them, with a flame which burned invincibly up from his heart. He saw the shadow lace of the vines and a tracery of trembling leaves on a drooping maple bough beyond; he saw, in the distance, mountain shoulders melting away into liquid skies, but he saw all these things only as brush-strokes in the background, for she herself was the picture that his soul drank through his eyes. Soon he must crush her to his breast, and let her heart beat there against his own, where it belonged.

But while he saw so much she could see only two

eyes that were fascinating, hypnotizing her, until all else faded and they seemed twin stars drawing her to them irresistibly out of space and across the universe, swinging her will as the moon swings the tides.

She took an involuntary step toward him with lifted arms, and then with a strong effort as if struggling against a spell, she drew back again, and her voice came very low and broken.

"I can't — I can't!" she pleaded. "But I wish to God I could."

Then Anse Havey began to speak.

"Ye've talked an' I've listened to ye. Ye've taken my life away from me an' made it a little scrap of your own life. . . . Ye've let us both come to needin' each other more than food an' drink an' breath. . . . For me there's no life without ye. In all the earth, there's just *you — you — you!* For every true woman in the world a day comes when there's just one man, an' for every man there's just one woman. . . . When that day comes nothin' else counts. That's why all them reasons of yours don't mean anything."

His voice had the ring of triumph. "You're goin' to marry me to-night. Come!"

He raised both arms and held them out, and though for a moment she hung back her eyes were still irresistibly held by his and the magnetism that dwelt in them. With a gasping exclamation that was half surrender and half echo of his own triumph, she swept into his embrace.

About them the world swam and danced to the harping of the stars. She knew only that she had come home and that, resting here with those arms about her

against that strong breast, she felt safe and deliriously happy. He felt her throbbing heart-beat; felt the warmth of her fluttering breath on his cheek; felt the softness of her arms about his neck, and the miraculous touch of her answering lips on his own.

A stray lock fell over her brow and its strands enmeshed his kisses against her face. How could she who was so frail and yielding in his tight-locked arms have been so powerful? How could a creature whose touch was as cool and soft as sentient velvet have reduced him to this slavery which made him a king? Then proudly he answered himself. It was because she was the one woman; because her delicately fibered being had a strength beyond his brawn; because she was the stronger for being weaker.

But after a time, she drew back a little so that she could look up again into his face, and with his arms about her and her arms about his neck, she smiled out of eyes that swam as mistily as the moon and as brightly, and lips that no longer held a hint of drooping.

As she locked her fingers caressingly behind his dark head, she wished for words fine and splendid beyond the ordinary to tell him of her love. But no phrases of eloquence came. So she found herself murmuring those ancient words of willing surrender, that have become trite because they have not been improved upon —" Thy people shall be my people and thy ways, my ways."

Then she felt his arms grow abruptly rigid and he was pressing her from him with a gentle insistence while his face turned to peer out into the moonlight

with the tensity of one who is listening not only with his ears, but every sensory nerve of his being.

Slowly he drew back, still tense and alert, and from his eyes the tender glow died until they narrowed and hardened and the jaw angle stiffened and the lips drew themselves into their old line of warlike sternness. She was looking again into the face of the mountaineer; the feudist; of the wild creature turning to stand at bay.

For a moment they remained motionless, and her fingers resting on his arms felt the strain of his tautened biceps.

"God!" he muttered almost inaudibly.

"What is it?" she whispered, but he replied only with a warning shake of the head.

Once more he stood listening, then gently turned her so that his body was between her and the outside. He thrust her back into the open door and followed her inside.

His words came slowly and though they were calm they carried a very bitter note.

"I must go. . . . I hoped they'd let me live long enough to marry ye, but I reckon they're weary of bidin' their time."

He had closed the door and stood looking down at her with a deep hunger in his face.

"What is it, Anse? What did you hear out there?" Her face had gone pallid and she clung to his arms with a grip that indicated no intention of release.

"Nothin' much. Just the crackin' of a twig or two; just some steps in the brush that was too cautious to sound honest; little noises that wouldn't

mean much if I didn't know what they *do* mean. They weren't friendly sounds. They're after me."

"Who? What do you mean?"

Her voice came in a low panic of whispering, and even as she spoke the man was listening with his head bent toward the closed door.

He laughed mirthlessly under his breath. "I don't know who they've picked out to get me. It don't matter much, does it? But I know they've picked to-night. I've been lookin' for it, but it seems like they might have let me have to-night —" His lips smiled and for an instant his eyes softened again to tenderness. "This was *my* night; our night."

"If they are out there, Anse," her eyes flashed suddenly and her grip tightened, "you sha'n't go. I won't let you go. In this house you are behind walls at least. I can't let you go."

"It's the only way," he told her; and again she read unshakable resolve written in his face. "My best chance is out there. Them mountains'll take better care of me than any walls — if I can once get to cover." Suddenly he wheeled and caught her fiercely in his arms, holding her very close, and now her heart was beating more wildly than before; beating with a sudden and sickening terror.

He bent low and covered her temples and cheeks and lips and eyes with kisses. "God knows, when I came here, to-night," he declared, talking fast and passionately, "I didn't aim to ever go away again without ye. Now I've got to, but if I come through an' there's a breath or a drop of blood left in me, I'll be back. I'm a-comin' back, dearest, if I live."

Her answer was a low moan.

He released her at last and went over to the gun-rack.

Standing before her shrine of guns, in her temple of disarmament, he said slowly, "Dearest, I was about the last man to leave my rifle here, an' I reckon I've got to be the first to take it out again. I'm sorry. Will you give it to me or must I take it without permission?"

She came slowly over, conscious that her knees were trembling, and that ice-water seemed to have taken the place of hot blood in her veins.

"If you need it," she faltered, "take it, dear — nothing else matters. Which one shall I give you?"

"My own!" His voice was for the instant imperious. It was almost as if someone had asked Ulysses what bow he would draw in battle. "I reckon my own gun's good enough fer me. It has been till to-day."

She withdrew the rifle from the rack herself, and he took it from her trembling hands, but when he had accepted it she threw her arms about him again and wildly clung to him, her eyes wide with silent suffering and dread.

The crushing grasp of his arms hurt her and she felt a wild joy in the pain. Then she resolutely whispered, "Go, dearest, go! Time is precious now, and God keep you!"

"Juanita," he said slowly, "I have refused to talk to you in good speech. I have clung to the rough phrases and the uncouth manners of the hills, but I want you to know always, most dear, that I have loved

you not only fiercely, but gently, too. No tenderer worship lives in your own world. If I don't come back think of that. God knows I love you."

"Don't, Anse!" she cried with a smothered sob. "Don't talk like a soft-muscled lowlander! Talk to me in your own speech. It rings of strength and God knows —" her voice broke and she added with fierce tenderness —"God knows, dear eagle-heart, you need all the strength of wing and talon to-night."

Then she opened the back door very cautiously where the shadows slept in inky blackness and saw him slip away and melt instantly into the murk.

CHAPTER XXXVI

OUT there the moon was setting. Soon, thank God, it would be dark everywhere. The man she loved needed all the chance that the thickening murk could give him. It was terribly quiet now, except for an occasional whippoorwill call, and the quietness seemed to lie upon her with the oppression of something unspeakably terrifying. The breath of hillside and sky was bated.

At last there came to her ears the sound of heavy feet crashing through the brush, but he had been gone ten minutes then. Perhaps they had just awakened to his escape and were casting aside stealth for the fury of open pursuit. She even thought she heard an oath once, and then it was all quiet again; quiet for a while and at the end of the silence, like the punctuation of an exclamation mark, came the far-away snap of a rifle.

She had dropped to a chair and sat there tensely leaning forward, her lips parted and her ears straining. Had she heard one shot and its echoes or had there been several? Her imagination and fears were playing her tricks now and she could hardly be certain of her senses.

Once she started violently with the sense that she had heard his voice exclaim, "God!" as he had muttered it out there on the porch, but of course that was

only a reaction of memory. She closed her eyes, but that made the agonized suspense of her waiting worse a hundred-fold, for when the familiar things of the hall were shut out other things came. In her fancy she saw him lying among the rocks and tangled branches, wounded desperately and seeking to hold back swarms of enemies who drew closer and closer about him with their cordon of blazing rifles. She could see the grim doggedness with which he was dying and the grim doggedness with which they were killing him. But he would not die alone! He would take his own toll first.

Then she pulled herself together. She must hold on to her faculties. In the way of such imaginings lay madness! Come what might he was the strongest of them all and the most consummate woodsman. He would elude them. They were like crows badgering and hectoring a great hawk in flight, and only succeeding in annoying him. The hawk had only to alight and face them and they would fly wildly away.

And yet an insistent little advocate of despair kept whispering to her heart; suppose there were so many crows, that the hawk could not alight! It would not do to follow that train of thought either. She and Anse had once stood together on the crest, watching the darting attack of several of the black pests as they hovered about the spread pinions of an eagle, until the eagle fled high into the sky.

"Why doesn't he kill one or two?" she had irritably demanded and the man only laughed.

"Have the mountains got into your blood? Have ye got the killin' instinct, too?"

She had been indignant at the question. Yet now

she was praying that he, her mate of the windy crests, should kill and conquer. If anyone had fallen under that shot she heard, God grant that it might be one of his assailants. Yes, for the first time she knew now that in her heart, too, had wakened a germ of that killing instinct that heights and desolation breed and breathe into the human breath. Mixed and tangled with her fear and grief was something of the ecstasy of war, prophetess of peace and disarmament though she was.

The passage of time was a thing of which she had lost count. Each moment was a century. Her eyes wandered absently over the room and fell upon the piano. He had brought it for her from Peril. She turned her glance away from that reminder only to have it fall on the spread eagle wings above the mantel. He had told her how many years that bird had preyed and pillaged and how long he had hunted it before it fell at last under his rifle. Now he, too, was out there, being hunted. She groaned horribly and fell to trembling.

She knew that she hungered for this man. Why had she waited too long? Why had she been so tardy in discovering her own heart? At least she might have had memories.

Her thoughts ran into pictures of what life together might mean for them, their companionship in the high, wild places, where each had work to do. She wanted her "hunter home from the hill."

A great oak table, fashioned in keeping with the massiveness of the house, stood before her. On its top was a littered array of papers and heavy volumes, dictionaries, encyclopædias and a copy of Fox's "Book of

Martyrs." These things all seemed to be an accusation now. They were as much the symbols of what she had done in the mountains, as the rood over a steeple is the symbol of a church. And what had it all come to? The last act of the drama she had staged was being brought to climax out in the dark woods where the man she loved was trailed by human blood-hounds, set on the chase by captains of progress.

Then with a violent start she sat up. Now she knew she heard a sound; there could be no doubt this time. It came from out beyond the front door, and she bent forward, listening.

It was a strange sort of sound which she could not make out, but in some subtle way it was more terrifying than the clatter of rifles. It was as if some heavy, soft thing were being dragged up the steps, and rolling back. She rose and took a step to the door, but halted in doubt. The sound died and then came again, always with halting intervals of silence between, as though whoever were dragging the burden had to pause on each step to rest. Then there was a scraping as of boot leather on the boards and a labored breath outside, a breath that seemed to be agonized. She bent forward with one hand outstretched toward the latch and heard a faint rapping. It was seemingly the rap of very feeble fingers, but that might all be part of a ruse. Was it a friend or an enemy out there just beyond the thickness of the heavy panels? At all events she must see.

She braced herself and threw the door open. A figure which had been leaning against it lurched forward, stumbled over the threshold and fell in a heap

half in and half out. It was the figure of Anse Havey.

How far he had hitched himself along foot by foot like a mortally wounded animal crawling home to die, she could not tell, but for one horrified instant she stood gazing down on him in stupefaction. He had gone out a splendid vital creature of resilient strength and power. He had come back the torn and bleeding wreck of a man, literally shot to pieces as a quail is shattered when it rises close to a quick-shooting gun.

In the next moment she was stooping with her arms around his body, striving to lift his weight and bring him in. She was strong beyond all seeming of her slenderness, but the man was heavy and as she raised his head and shoulders a sound of bitten-off and stifled agony escaped his white lips and she knew that her efforts were torturing him.

It was an almost lifeless tongue that whispered, "I was skeered . . . that I . . . wouldn't get here."

Then as she staggered under his inert bulk he tried to speak again. "Jest help . . . drag me."

The few yards into the hall were a long and terrible journey, and how she got him in, half hanging to her, half crawling, stopping at every step, she never knew. Still it was done at last and she was kneeling on the floor with his head on her breast.

No wonder they had left him for dead and gone away content. He looked up and a faint smile came to his almost unrecognizable face. The blood which had already dried and caked with the dust through which he had crawled was being fed by a fresher out-pouring, and, as she held him close to her, her own bosom and

arms became red, too, with the spilling life current, as red as the flower pinned in her hair.

She must stanch his wounds and pour whisky down his throat, before the flickering wisp of life-flame burned out.

"Wait, dearest," she said in a broken voice. "I must get things you need."

"It ain't —" he paused a moment for the breath which came very difficultly —"hardly . . . worth while . . . I'm done."

But she flew to the cupboard where there was brandy. She tore linen from her petticoat and brought water from the drinking bucket that stood with its gourd dipper on the porch.

But when she pressed the flask to his lips he closed them and shook his head a little.

"I ain't never touched a drop in my life," he said, "an' I reckon . . . I might's well . . . finish out. . . . 'Twon't be long." For a while he lay gasping, then spoke again weakly.

"Just kiss me . . . dearest . . . thet's what I come for."

She went on bathing and stanching his wounds as best she could, but a spirit of despair settled on her. There were so many of them and they were so deep and ragged!

"I didn't . . . come for help," he told her and through the grime and blood flashed a ghost of his rare and boyish smile. "I'm past mendin' now . . . I came because . . . I'm dyin' . . . an' I wanted thet your arms . . . should be around me . . . once more."

"You sha'n't die," she breathed fiercely between her teeth. "My arms shall always be around you."

But he shook his head and his figure sagged a little against her knees.

"I know . . . when I'm done . . ." he said slowly. "It's all right now. . . . I've done got here. That's enough . . . I loves ye."

For a time she wondered whether he had lost consciousness, and she laid him down slowly and brought cushions with which to soften his position. It was almost daybreak now.

She sat there beside him and as her heart beat close to his he seemed to draw from it some of its abundant vitality, for he revived a little, and though his eyes were closed and she had to bend down to catch his words his voice grew somewhat stronger.

"I ain't never felt lonesome . . . before . . . but out there . . . dyin' by myself . . . the last of my family . . . I was . . . I had to come. . . . Dyin' ain't like livin'. . . . I had to see ye once more."

"You aren't dying," she argued desperately, "you sha'n't die."

"Yes," he said, "I'm dyin' . . . an' now the sooner . . . the better . . . I reckon."

She bent lower and held him very gently close to her heart. "You are suffering horribly, dearest," she groaned.

"It ain't that. . . ." His breath came with great difficulty. "They'll come back here. They'll get me yet . . . an' I'd ruther die first."

She laid his head very gently on the pillows and rose

to her feet. In the instant she stood transfigured. Deep in her violet eyes blazed such a blue fire as that which burns at the hot heart of a flame. Around her lips came the grim set of fight and blood-lust.

The crushed flower on her bosom rose and fell under a quick tempest of passion. The skirt of her evening gown had been torn in her effort to carry him. Somehow one silk stocking had sagged above her slipper. His blood reddened her white arms and bosom. She drew a deep breath and clenched her hands. The disciple of Peace was gone and there stood now in its stead the hot-breathed incarnation of some Valkyrie hovering over the din of battle and urging on the fight.

Yet her voice was colder and steadier than he had ever heard it. She pointed to the door.

"Get you!" she exclaimed scornfully. "No man but a Havey crosses that threshold while I live. I'm a Havey now and we both live or we both die together. Get you!" Her voice broke with a wild laugh. "Let them come!"

No bitterly bred daughter of the hills was ever so completely the mountain woman as this transformed and re-born girl of the cultured East. She moved about the place with a steady, indomitable energy. With strength borrowed of the need she upset the great oaken table and barricaded the door, laughing as she heard the clatter of pedagogic volumes on the floor. Fox's "Book of Martyrs" fell at her feet and she kicked it to the side.

She went and stood before her rack of guns and her lips curled as she caught one up with all the fierce desire of a drunkard for his drink. She stood there, loading

rifles and setting them in an orderly line against the wall. She devastated her altar of peace with the untamed joy of a barbarian sacking a temple.

Then she turned and saw in the man's eyes a wild glow of admiration that burned hotly above his fever, and she said to him, once more, "Now let 'em come."

He shook his head, but strangely enough her love and awakened ferocity had strengthened him like brandy, and he pleaded, "Drag me over where I can get just one shot."

Then Juanita blew out the lamp and stood silent in the hush that comes before dawn. She did not have to wait long, for soon she heard hoof-beats in the road, and they stopped just at the turn.

"Hello, stranger!" she shouted, and it took all her strength to command her voice. "Halt where you are."

There was an instant's silence in the first misty gray that was bringing the veiled sunrise.

A stifled murmur of voices came from the road, and she caught the words, "He's in thar all right." A moment later someone called out sullenly from the shadows.

"We gives ye three minutes ter leave thet house. We're a-comin' in an' we'd rather not ter harm ye. Git out quick."

CHAPTER XXXVII

"YE can't save me, dearest; it's too late for that. For God's sake go out," pleaded Anse Havey tensely.

Her answer was to cry out into the dawn in a voice that could not be misunderstood, "Anse Havey's in here. Come and get him. Damn you!" and for added emphasis, she crouched behind the overturned table and fired a random shot out toward the voice that had offered her amnesty.

From the earlier chapters of the evening the men out there knew that the school property was empty save for the man and the girl, and they knew that the man was wounded.

Their peering eyes, in the dim gray of dawn, could just make out an empty door. Back of it was one woman, and they were five men. Ordinarily they would have moved slowly and cautiously, coming up from several sides, but now every minute was worth an hour at another time. It behooved them, when full daylight came, to be well away on their flight from sure vengeance. The obvious demand of the exigency was to rush the place.

Killing women was, even to them, distasteful, but they had offered her immunity and she had declined.

At a whispered word they started forward.

They had only fifty yards of clearing to cross and

the girl crouching behind the overturned table did not know how strong they might be in numbers. She knew only that in every artery ran a white fire of passion and a longing to avenge. She meant to make her Shrine of Disarmament a crater of death under whose lava no human creature could live. She remembered the caution of a man with whom she had once shot quail. "Take your time when they rise and pick your birds." Now Juanita Holland meant to pick her birds.

She saw figures climbing the fence in shadowy, almost impalpable shapes, and as the first dropped inside and started on at a crouching trot, she aimed quickly, but steadily, and fired.

A little cry of primitive and savage joy leaped from her lips as she saw the man plunge forward in the half light and lie there thrashing about on the ground. Once an English army officer had told her, in a drawing-room, that a soldier feels no sense of compunction when an enemy goes down under his hand in battle. She had raised her chin a little and turned coolly away, feeling for such a man only distaste. Now she understood.

But at that warning the others leaped down and came on at a run. The tempo quickened and became confusing. They were firing as they ran and their answering bullets pelted against her barrier and over her head on the walls. She heard window panes shivering and glass falling, and yet her elation grew — two more advancing figures had crumpled into inert masses. Unless there were reënforcements she would stem their on-coming tide. Even a mountain marksman cannot target his shots well while he is running and under fire. It takes

championship sprinting to do fifty yards in five seconds — on the smoothness of a cinder path.

Up hill in a constant spit of fire and lead it requires a little longer.

There were only two assailants left now and one of them suddenly veered and made for the cover of a hickory trunk off to one side — he was in full flight. But the other came on, throwing the rifle away and shifting his heavy magazine pistol to his right hand.

It was easy now, thought the girl — she could take her time and be very sure.

Yet she shot and missed, and the man came on with the confidence of one who wears a talisman and fears no harm. Now he was almost at the steps and his pistol was barking viciously — then suddenly something in the mechanism of Juanita's rifle jammed and it lay useless and dead in her hands. She struggled with it, frantically jerking the lever, but before she had conquered its balking obstinacy she saw the on-coming figure leap up the steps at one stride and thrust his weapon forward over the table. She even caught the glitter of his teeth as a snarling smile parted his lips.

Then a rifle spoke behind her, a rifle in the hands of the man who had dragged himself to the firing line, and with his foot on the threshold Jim Fletcher reeled backward and rolled lumberingly down the steps to the ground.

"You got him!" she screamed, "you got him, Anse!"

It had been perhaps five minutes since she had called out to the men in the road, but it seemed that she had sustained a long siege. She saw the one man who had

fled, crossing the fence and disappearing. Then very slowly she rose and turned to the room again.

Anse Havey was lying on his face and the gun with which he had killed Jim Fletcher lay by his side, but his posture was so rigid and his limbs so motionless that the girl caught at her breast and reeled backward. She would have fallen had she not been supported by the table. Had the fight been lost after all?

Slowly and in a daze of reaction and fright, she moved forward and turned his body over, and laid her ear to his heart.

It was still beating. The rifle had only jolted his weak and pain-racked body into unconsciousness, and as she held his head to her breast, her eyes went roving about the room into which the pallid dawn had begun stealing. Then, hanging by the mantel, she saw the horn that Jerry Everson had given her, faintly catching and reflecting the first of the light.

Why had she not thought of that before? she asked herself accusingly. Why had she not sent its call for help out across the hills long ago? Then there came back to her memory the words of the mountain donor when he had brought it over and had imitated the Havey battle call.

"Don't never blow them three longs an' three shorts unlessen ye wants ter start hell. When thet call goes out acrost the mountains every Havey thet kin tote a gun's got ter git up an' come."

If ever there had been a time when every Havey should come it was this time. She laid Anse's head once more on the cushions and went to the mantel. Then standing in the door, she drew a long breath.

The ridges were vague apparitions now along whose slopes trailed shreds of mist. A gray world of ghost-like dawn spread out with shapes that lost themselves in shapelessness and a chill hung in the air.

So she set the horn to her lips and blew. Out across the melting vagueness of the dim world floated the three long blasts and the three short blasts. She waited a little while and blew again. That signal could not reach Anse Havey's own house, because the ridge would send it echoing back in a shattered wave of sound. It would be better heard to the east, and after a time there came back to her waiting ears, very low and distant, yet very clear, an answer.

It came from the house of Milt McBriar and Juanita's heart, torn and anxious as it was, leaped, for she knew that for the first time in the memory of man the Havey call to arms had been heard and was being answered by a chief of the McBriars, and that as fast as horses could carry them he and his men would bring succor.

An hour later, when the mountain slopes were unveiling in miracles of iridescence and tender color, Young Milt McBriar and his escort came upon them.

The girl was weeping incoherently over an insensible figure and crooning to him as a mother sings to quiet a fretful child, and on the floor at her side lay a piece of paper rumpled and reddened with blood — a marriage license.

"Milt," she wildly cried out, "get Brother Anse, get him quick!" And she waved the piece of smeared paper in the boy's face.

Kneeling with her on the floor, Milt took the license

from her hand and when he saw what it was he very dubiously shook his head.

"I'm afraid," he told her gravely, "I'm afraid hit's too late, ma'am. He kain't hardly live thet long."

"Get Brother Anse," she insisted fiercely; "get him quick. I'm going to be his wife." Her voice broke into a wild sob as she added, "If I can't be anything else, I'm going to be the Widow Havey."

And when Good Anse came, he found Bad Anse still alive, smiling faintly up into the face of the woman who sat with his head in her lap, and they were both waiting.

"I'm right sorry," said the missionary simply when the words were spoken, "thet ye didn't hev a preacher thet could 'a' married ye with due ceremonies, but I reckon I hain't never been gladder ter do nothin' in my life — ef only he kin git well."

"Brother Anse," Juanita Havey told him, as she put a hand on each rough shoulder, "I had rather it had been you than the Archbishop of Canterbury."

. . . . . .

People in the mountains still talk of how, while Anse Havey lay on a white cot in the little hospital, young Milt McBriar set out toward Peril. He stopped for a moment at the house of Bad Anse Havey and within twenty minutes the hills were being raked. Young Milt killed a horse getting to Jeb McNash's cabin on Tribulation and Jeb killed another getting to Peril. Then from Lexington came two surgeons as fast as a special train could bring them, and thanks to a dogged life spark they found Anse Havey still lingering on the margin of life.

When they removed him from the operating table back to his cot, and he opened his eyes in consciousness, the sun was coming through the shaded window, but even before he realized that, he saw her face bending over him, and felt cool fingers on his forehead.

As his eyes opened her smile greeted him, and she brushed his lips with her own. Then in a tone of command she said, "You mustn't talk. The doctors say you may get well, if you obey orders and fight hard. It's partly up to you, Anse."

Once more there hovered around the man's lips their occasional boyish smile.

"I reckon," he said slowly, "they'll have the hell of a time killin' me *now!*" Then he added in a tone of more grimness, "Besides, there's a score or two to settle."

The girl shook her head and smiled. Her fingers rested caressingly on the dark hair that fell over his forehead.

"No, Anse," she told him. "I settled most of them myself."

. . . . . .

Even the detachment of the murder squad that had played its part in the woods and started for Peril before the five turned back, did not reach the town, but scattered into the hillsides. When morning brought the news of their attempt they tried to make their escape across the mountains to Virginia.

But there was a grim and relentless system about the movement of two posses that set out to comb the timber. Daring approach no house for food, the fugitives took up their stand at last in a stanch log cabin which had

been deserted and died there, grimly declining to surrender.

Of course the railroad came up Tribulation and crossed through the notch in the mountains at the gap, but the railroad came on terms quite different from those which Mr. Trevor and his ilk had planned.

One day there rode away from Holland College a gay little procession, on its way to the house of Milt McBriar. At its head rode young Milt himself and on a pillion behind him, as mountain brides have always ridden to their own houses, was Dawn McBriar.

That was some years ago and at the big log house there is a toddling, tow-headed young person now whose name is Anse Havey McBriar, though his father insists he is to be ultimately known as "Bad Anse" McBriar. So far the name has not been given general recognition, though his mother affectionately calls him "Badness."

One autumn day when the air was as full of sparkle as champagne and the big "sugar tree" just outside the hospital window was flaming in an ecstasy of color, when even the geese by the creek waddled with the fat comfort of burghers at a festival, Miss Dawn Havey opened her eyes on the world and found it acceptable.

Jeb McNash was riding through the country that October, seeking election to the Legislature.

He drew his horse down by the fence and raised his eyes to the little building up the hillside where the mystery of a new life was sheltered. Then a slow grin came to his lips.

"Anse," he said in his slow drawl, "it's right smart of a pity she's a gal now, hain't it?"

Anse shook his head. "I reckon," he said, "she's

got more chance to be like her mother. Her mother made these hills better for being here and besides —"

He looked cautiously about and dropped his voice as if speaking of a forbidden subject, yet into it crept an unconcealable pride:

"Besides, young feller, have you got any more notches on the stock of your gun than *she* has?"

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